# Sevens

## 12 - There Will Probably be a lot of Misconceptions in the Stories by the Time They're Passed Down to You, Twelfth Generation

Wai

# 1 - Prologue

There came a stream of restless nights.

It was the season where the humidity from the port city became detestable.

And despite the season, we were currently moving through a dim passageway. Diagonally to my side was Novem, and she used her magic to make a light from her staff.

Both the ceiling and floor were of rugged rock. The walls grew moss, and were perpetually damp. Among Labyrinth passageways, it was of the wider sort, and there was at least eight meters to the ceiling. Its width around twenty. In the midst of battle, I doubt there would be a need to worry about a lack of space.

Around, in blue, or perhaps navy suits of armor, the three Valkyrie units guarded the two of them. But there wasn't really a need for that.

Two weeks distance from Beim.

At present, I… Lyle Walt had been dispatched to subjugate a Labyrinth that had manifested.

That giant monster legion already felt like a thing of the distant past.

"… Clara, stay on standby. I'll have Miranda return to the surface. Aria, proceed onwards, and remove the monsters ahead."

I gave orders as I walked, but me and the girls… my party members had quite some distance between us.

Conversing through Skill… Connection… I issued orders to Aria, Miranda and Clara, who led Valkyrie Series units of their own.

I turned an eye to the Valkyrie walking opposite to Novem.

(The mass produced unit Damien and old Letarta completed… not bad.)

The ones they had successfully completed had been simplified, and while there were differences in their appearances and body types, there wasn't any difference in their specs. They were wearing visor-like face masks, and I couldn't tell what expressions they were making, but the Valkyrie Series were generally expressionless.

The wing-like binders on their backs could process magic stones into a liquid, which they could then use as fuel. It considerably reduced my Mana cost, so it was a huge help.

Black hair was the standard. However, each had devoted its time to differentiating itself with hair style. Bob cut, long waves. Braids. It seems the mass produced models had personality and a sense of individuality as well.

While walking through the uneven corridor, I was organizing the information flowing into my head.

This Labyrinth that had manifested out of a cave had only three floors to speak of. But the annoying part was the expanse it covered.

It seems there was only a single boss at the bottom, and there was little deviation in its monsters. We weren't particularly having a hard time. Three separate Labyrinth Subjugation requests had descended on Beim, and there were few adventurer parties they could send around.

Alette-san's party had challenged another Labyrinth, and it was decided they would dispatch mercenaries of the South Branch to the last one.

The East Branch normally wouldn't let Labyrinth Subjugations fall to other branches. Because if they did, the East Branch's sole valuable appeal point would disappear. They wouldn't be able to gather adventurers.

While I absentmindedly wandered the cave, I ran into Miranda on her way out.

"I could hear your voice the whole way, but meeting is yet another sensation."

There were four mass-produced Valkyries around her, and a sister carrying the luggage, her knees shaking as she shed her sweat.

One of the Valkyries held a lantern in her hand to light up the surroundings.

Miranda was wearing a hat, with a large rucksack over her back. She wasn't in her usual skirt, instead donning thick work clothes, and gloves.

"Looks like things went well on your side as well. Shannon, there won't be any monsters on the way back, so rest easy."

There, Shannon raised her face, but perhaps from fatigue, she didn't rain me with jeers as she usually did.

"… I want to take a bath."

When she complained, Miranda lowered a fist.

"Shannon, could you quit it already? See, just a little more to the first floor. Once we're there, a short break, and we'll be outside."

While Miranda tried to knock the life back into her, Shannon simply tottered as she walked off. And Miranda's party started down the road we had came from. I let out a sigh.

"Looks like Shannon's doing alright.

The one to respond was Novem. She was laughing, and with the long gazes she took at the girl, I'm sure she was happy at her growth.

"She didn't have any stamina before. If we keep at it little by little, she'll build up some strength. Even so, this time's Labyrinth sure is vast."

The second floor.

At the head, Aria and Miranda were eliminating monsters. Clara was keeping the roads clear on the first floor.

And Eva or May would likely substitute out with Miranda when she got back.

“It’s our second Labyrinth subjugation, and everyone’s already a commander. Of course, we were the only ones dispatched in the first place. Good grief, just what part about this is small scale?”

As a Labyrinth, it was only three floors. Needlessly wide, with only one boss.

With the scarce variety of monsters, there weren’t any particularly strong ones. Certainly, in the guild’s classification system, it wouldn’t be strange for it to be written off as small scale.

But I felt a little of a grudge.

(It’s also a problem how the amount of stones we have to earn has been defined. I want to take the shortest route, beat the boss, and end it already.)

That was from the Guild’s side. Not the East Branch, headquarters had ordered us to acquire a set amount of Magic Stones.

I asked Alette-san, and it seems there had rarely even been such orders given out. If you find some rare material, then get as much of it as you can, was the most they ever asked for, she said.

The Third spoke to me amused.

『You’ve gotten their hate quite nicely, Lyle. Just a little more.』

… I knew that, but getting this persistent harassment was harsh.

This venture through the vast passages was also to test out the mass produced Valkyries’ specs.

Old Letarta and Damien were on standby up top, and Adele-san and Maksim-san were participating as well.

However, Monica was keeping house at the mansion.

Novem smiled at me as she spoke.

“It’s because they believe we can do that much. I’m sure the Guild isn’t stupid enough to offer an impossible task, and have another Labyrinth Rampage on their hands.”

“… I’d really hope that’s so.”

Last time, Fidel-san swung them around to his will, and got twelve cannons’ worth of compensation, I heard. And it seems the Guild executives took it up to get the man’s backing.

In exchange for advocating in regards to their failed defensive war, they drank down his demands.

(Well, the two extra cannons flowed from Vera to me, but…)

We were talking, but cutting it off on the way, I pulled a weapon from my hip. Novem had to illuminate the surroundings, so she couldn’t take action. She stepped back, and strengthened the light.

The Valkyrie Series took their weapons from their back wing binders. They were guns.

They were items prepared by old Letarta, who modified them, apparently.

The Valkyries…

“Enemy confirmed. Proceeding to eliminate.”
“Likewise.”
“Bang.”

After the guns blew their flames, three monster responses in the passageway ahead went out. Even so, the survivors came out way.

The Valkyries swiftly prepared for the next attack, while the third unit alone lowered her gun.

The monsters on the other side of the dark passage collapsed without showing their forms.

I put away a Katana, and scratched my head.

“… Their performance is definitely high, but…”

Novem gave a bitter smile as well. Coming to my side, she agreed with my assertion.

“Compared to a single monster of this Labyrinth, a bullet is more

costly… we're going into the red."

They had high specs, but I couldn't help but have problems on the financial front. This time was just an experiment, so Letarta had them carry just the guns, but money-wise, they were a weapon I didn't want to use so often.

The Valkyries took out tools to strip off the Magic Stones and materials.

"It is time for robbery."
"I will cleanly pick them off."
"Dissection is my specialty. Someday, those money eating worms manufactured before us, and that piece of junk Monica shall be dissected by my hands as well."

The third unit gave an ominous statement, but I ignored it. I could understand it was just standard communication from these ones.

"I don't want to take too much time. Once we get to the third floor, I'll have Eva or May deliver supplies down. Have we achieved the quota?"

When I checked in with Connection, a Valkyrie on the surface replied. She was carrying out Adele-san's support.

『… According to Adele, we have currently fulfilled sixty percent of the required quota. But hearing of the bullet consumption, she started crying.』

On top of that, I heard the voice coming into the Valkyrie's ears.

『AAAaaAAH! Our expenses! Why!? Why make them use such a thing!? We're down! Our profits from this Labyrinth Subjugation are going poooof!!』

Looks like she has it rough.

"Okay, let's put a usage restriction on the guns. Any more, and I'll feel bad for Adele-san."

There, the Fourth let a tired voice from the Jewel.

『Lyle, you understand this is also your problem, right? Properly make a profit, man. Experiments are important, but money problems are just as important.』

Advice quite suited of the Fourth Generation.

❼

… Information dealer Rauno's office.

In it, the windows were shut and curtained, darkening the room. The only faint light emanated from the use of Rauno's assistant Innis' Skill… Information.

From the information Innis had on hand, it was a Skill to predict the future.

Rauno put both hands in his pockets, and looked over Innis.

"So how is it, Innis?"

Her eyes were closed, and after a while, she opened her mouth. Rauno had her read through as much of the information he'd gathered as possible.

To hit the mark on her predictions, she couldn't help but need a large amount of info. But it wasn't like her accuracy was directly proportional to her information level. Because fake information would always slip around.

But with more information, there were more things she could determine, and a bigger picture she could see based on that.

"… Beim is still recovering from the damage that monster army caused."

When the army of monsters was closing in, they had scattered money, and produced large numbers of weapons. But Lyle had defeated the majority at Fort Redant, so looking at actual damage from enemy numbers, it was something quite insignificant.

Rather than physical damage, it was severe monetary, and resource

loss.

“Good work for them to recover so much in only a few months. But I guess that’s Beim for you.”

On Rauno’s light words, Innis didn’t show a response. She continued on with her predictions.

“There are strange movements in Cartaffs. It may escalate to a large-scale riot. Also…”

“Also?”

“In the Guild headquarters, and among the merchants, dissatisfaction towards Lyle-san is rising. I conclude that pressure is being put down mainly by those not involved in backing him.”

Rauno gave a bitter smile.

“Why of course. Rile up the Trēs House’ head, and even the South Branch, and of course you’ll be hated. Though I doubt he doesn’t know that.”

“… The Trēs House is watching, and waiting. Even when the other merchants and Guild make their moves, they don’t show any interest. The current Trēs House head is sure to have backed him. The probability of him being riled up on purpose is high.”

Rauno couldn’t understand that part. The face that Lyle had seduced one of the Trēs House daughters was something he had confirmed from rumor, and the individual himself.

So he didn’t know the reason behind angering the head.

“Does that mean he got the amount of money he needed already?”

“… The probability is low. There is a possibility he has made a large change in objectives along the way.”

Rauno watched over Lyle’s actions with caution. It wasn’t because he was a client.

It was because Lyle could slip up Innis’ predictions altogether.

With the monster army as well, Innis had determined victory would be held down after heavy damage came out.

But the result could be called an overwhelming triumph.

“Young as he is, he’s leading the Guild and merchants by the nose… he won’t live long, that one. After Beim kicks him out, where will he go? Become the groom of Zayin’s Holy Maiden, or Lorphys’ princess?”

Innis replied to his joke.

“The individual has shown actions pointing to the desire to be exiled from Beim. And the probability of him becoming a groom alive is low.”

While knowing full well that Innis rarely hit straight when things came to Lyle, he couldn’t help but look into him.

“Now then, how will he move next, my client?”

Innis opened her eyes. Perhaps she had overused her Skill, as she looked as if she’d collapse to the floor. Rushing over, and supporting up her body, Rauno put her to sleep on the sofa…

❼

… Adventurer Guild Headquarters.

In it, talks were being conducted, from the defense of Fortress Redant, to the changing situation of neighboring lands.

It was fine and all that a country had fallen, but in its place, the superpower of Bahnseim was now in contact with them.

The royalty that had fled from the land had taken flight to Bahnseim, but it didn’t seem they wished to retake power. No, they weren’t in a situation where they could make such demands.

They had overlooked a Labyrinth running out of control, and brought great damage to other countries. If Bahnseim supported them to reestablish their country, Beim wouldn’t keep quiet. But as they

wanted some land between them and Bahnseim, Beim's opinion was to wring them out to an extent where they wouldn't collapse.

The reality was already beyond what those involved desired.

"What did the messenger of Bahnseim say?"

That meeting of executives gathered from the branches discussed how to deal with Bahnseim.

"No particular demands. As we have now become neighbors, they wish to keep the national border what it was before, and they want to open a space for various discussions in regards to tariffs."

Those negotiations would fall into the merchants' territory. Not the Guild.

Watching over the meetingroom, Tanya was participating as the guard of her superior, the East Branch's head.

"So shall the Guild treat them as we have before?"

When someone offered that statement, the moderator leading the meeting nodded.

"It's possible they may put out a request to borrow our strength in monster subjugation. But Bahnseim is a large nation. They have their backbone, so perhaps they won't send such requests our way."

The executives smiled.

They were making light of the stubbornness of nobles, and thinking they would come crying to Beim eventually.

The South Branch's executive spoke up.

"When you think of Bahnsim, they've had quite a few rebellion these years. I would like to be more assertive in dispatching mercenaries."

Hearing that, the moderator nodded.

"It's been quiet in Zayin and Beim these days, after all. It's a fact that the mercenaries have lost a place to earn. We'll put in a proposal to the merchants."

The South Branch's executive smiled on those words. No, he looked a little relieved.

Tanya spoke to her superior.

"They haven't been making much lately. Just the other day, they forced their way into taking over a Labyrinth Subjugation request, but they're getting quite impatient."

Tanya's superior, levelly…

"Is that not dangerous? Thinking of the importance of mercenary brigades, what will happen if we send them to a land with so much internal discord…"

They were both adventurers' Guilds of Beim, but their objectives were different. And the East Branch didn't think highly of the South Branch's rough way of doing things.

When adventurers of the East Branch were dispatched, a large portion of their reasons for worry started from the South Branch… the mercenaries.

At present, it seems they were thinking of sending their mercs, who'd built up their frustration, to rampage across Bahnseim.

"But that is their job. Well, not all of them are good people, and it's not like we're any different."

And the conference turned to a certain topic.

Once more, it was due to an utterance from the South Branch's executive.

"Come to think of it, that adventurer of the East Branch… Lyle Walt was a noble who flowed in from Bahnseim, was he?"

On his forced phrasing, Tanya's superior nodded with a smile.

"And what of it?"

"What, it's quite famous how the Walt House's daughter married into Bahnseim royalty. She's been rampaging around quite flashily, but she is still the queen of a major country. Isn't it time for us to show

some good will?”

To the South Branch executive, who was trying to take actions disadvantageous to Lyle, Tanya’s superior…

“Even if you call it good will… It’s true he was driven out, but from then on, there hasn’t been any intervention from Bahnseim. I doubt it would be profitable to poke around the thorn bush.”

The South Branch hung on obstinately.

“And that’s precisely why. If they come to learn of it later, it may raise doubt towards us.”

The moderator listened to the words of the two. And he gave down a verdict.

“… Negotiations haven’t even begun. Let us take action after watching how things go. And he is being useful to the Guild. It is our policy to treasure those that bring a profit to us.”

Meaning weighing Lyle and Celes on the scales, if the profit Lyle produced fell short of her, they would cut him off at any moment.

(… Lyle-kun, just what the hell did you say to the South Branch’s executive?)

Tanya sighed internally as she worried for Lyle…

# 2 - Taking Over

Returning to Beim from the Labyrinth Subjugation, I stopped by the Guild to report.

We arrived in Beim around noon, and after we returned to the mansion, and went over the reports, I headed for the East Branch.

Monica had clung onto me, and tearing her off was quite a trial, so I was a little tired.

When I arrived at the Guild, naturally enough, I headed for the third floor. I arrived, met with the receptionist manning the desk, and found myself surprised.

Long blond hair, and eyes that drooped a little. Her eyes were emerald, and she let out a fluffy atmosphere.

“Oh my, it’s been quite some time~.”

Stressing the end of her words, she confronted me with a bright smile. After standing, and preparing a drink from a pitcher in the room, she set it on the table.

“Marianne-san? Eh? Why?”

On my confusion, Marianne-san gave a bitter smile.

“Ahaha, the truth is I’ve been fired from the newbie-specialized desk on floor one. It’s that, you know? When I’m supposed to play the elder sister for them, that doesn’t really work out if our ages grow too far apart, perhaps? A within, yet just out of arm’s reach is important for the newbie desk.”

That’s the sort of position it was? I thought, but decided not to dig to deep into it for now. Rather, if I jumped onto a talk about her age, it would surely come off as insincere, given my own age.

I took the safer measure to shift the conversation.

From the Jewel, the Fourth…

『How about you tell her twenty is still in your strike zone? In all actuality, Thelma-san's already thirty six, right?』

Just what is he trying to accomplish? That on my mind, I ignored him, and with a vague smile on my face, I sat across the table from her.

"How dreadful. Ah, this is our report from this time's request."

Marianne-san accepted the envelope I held out, and checked over it. Taking another document from a drawer in the desk, she compared them.

"… There's barely a disparity from an official Guild report. The paperwork checks out."

Paperwork related matters were left to Adele-san. So I was able to devote myself to the practical applications of the Valkyrie Series.

It's just, the Valkyries had a large point of issue. As long as I didn't become their masters, they wouldn't be able to establish what they called a【Network】.

And doing that by myself would be quite a heafty burden, but there were plenty of other problems.

… They cost money. Just moving them cost money. Having the fight cost even more money.I understood the reason why a gathering of adventurers turned mercenaries were so desperate to collect funds.

"That's good. We'll be immobile from equipment maintenance and breaks for a while, so I'll show my face at the Guild on a later date. We can go over the available requests at that time, so…"

The formalities and documentation finished, I moved to leave the room. Marianne-san smiled at me.

"Yes. Splendid work. Have a nice rest."

## ❼

When I descended to the first floor, I saw a different receptionist

sitting at the counter Marianne-san once occupied.

I heard a bright voice, and looking closer, I saw a brown-haired cute-type receptionist. Much younger than Marianne-san, and with a different atmosphere than her.

Instead of fluffy, perhaps energetic would be in order?

Regardless, what she did was the same.

“That’s amazing! You were always【D】s up to now, but you’ve finally gotten a【C】! At this rate, you’ll be able to get your equipment together quicker than I thought. Good grief, you’ve gone against my plans in a good sense. Do your best from here on too, alright? I’ll also do my best.”

Odd job requests… usually cleaning the city, and helping out over the place. The usual evaluation you could expect from them was a【C】.

If you worked proficiently, a【B】, while【A】s rarely ever came out. Because if the requester gave an A, they’d be forced to pay an additional reward.

Well, up to now, they’d been doing terrible, and they’d finally gotten able to earn normal evaluations.

“No, if we get serious, something like this is nothing, I tell ‘ya.”

With a smile, she praised the new recruits. Falling forward, and making all sorts of gestures… she continued praising them. The quality of their equipment was low, and perhaps they had come to report at once, as they were covered in grime, but she dealt with them with a smile.

(So they had a replacement. Younger than Marianne-san, I see. My age, or a little younger?)

I don’t think the age restriction was that strong, but anyways, the newbie specialized receptionist wore a slightly-modified uniform, as she amiably and energetically took on fresh adventurers.

I had seen her face somewhere before.

(… Rühe-san, was it?)

It did look like she was quite suited to the task, but I couldn't help but feel there was something going on behind the scenes.

And as I observed the counter, I noticed a group watching over the same spot.

It was Erhart's party.

He wore a tank top up top, and while it had finally come to the right season for that, I didn't really know what to think of an adventurer exposing all his vitals. The large sword he carried was an exceedingly normal sword. Its name was Gramr.

He led around his companions, watching the spot with a conflicted expression on his face.

And as his comrades called out to the man, he moved to line up at another desk, when…

"Ah."

"Yo."

… Our eyes met.

## ❼

We left the Guild, and entered an establishment to listen to their story.

It was a store that offered a large quantity of food, and the taste wasn't bad, so for the adventurers who couldn't earn much, it was a shop to be thankful for, it seems.

I was usually surrounded by women, and mealtimes usually had a more of a graceful, or how should I put it… anyways, that sort of feeling. But Erhart's party had no restraint.

"Ah, waiter, another steak! Same as before!"
"Me too!

“Add on more bread!”
“For a drink, I’d like juice, the fresh-squeezed sort! With ice!”
“That lightly frozen fruit stuff for desert. For all of us!”

The waiter seemed used to it. But those around were also watching the party eat, so I ended up giving a wry smile.

Just hearing what they had to say for free was a little off, so I said I would treat them. Thereupon the individuals began reading down the menu starting with most expensive.

Their lack of restraint was actually quite a pleasant sight.

“Do you come here often?

Erhart conversed with my as he waited for his extra steak.

“You makin’ fun of me? From your point of view, it ain’t much, but this is a famous store all the upstart adventurers will bring their feet back to for nostalgia’s sake. Number one in Beim.”

No matter what he said, it sounded belligerent, but he didn’t outright challenge me as he did before.

I looked at the menu. For adventurers that didn’t make much, I saw it offered cheaper meals.

“No, I do think it’s a good place. I used to come to these sorts of places to eat quite often, after all.”

It was nostalgic. When I started out as an adventurer, I ate in places like these.

I stayed my nights in inns, and couldn’t handle any housework back then. In Dalien, we got around to living in a detached house, but worn as we were from completing requests, we would eat out.

Back then, it was me and Novem. And along the way, Aria joined in. I think I was quite inept and unreliable.

“… Taking women along, right? It sure must be nice, having a good face.”

He turned to me with an envious look on his face, but his face wasn’t

bad either. If he got his looks in order a bit more, then having women tag along wouldn't be…

(Come to think of it, there was that Larc guy in Cartaffs.)

He was an adventurer who carried a large sword like Erhart, but the rest was dubious.

"Well, no objections there."

"Keh! So what was it you wanted to ask?"

I wanted to ask about Marianne-san. Right now, Erhart's party was fulfilling requests as adventurers, and defeating monsters around Beim. They were working enough for a stable lifestyle.

You could call them splendid adventurers, and I was curious as to why the one who had raised them to that level, Marianne-san, was taken off new adventurer duty.

"It's about Marianne-san."

There, Erhart's party stopped eating, each of them hanging their heads in anguish. As I wondered what had happened, Erhart quietly began talking.

"… That woman, she betrayed us. Saying we had talent and such to work us up, she was really laughing at us behind our backs. I asked the other adventurers too, and she was a receptionist who worked by skillfully deceiving all the newbies. Since she's been promoted to the desks on the third floor, I'll bet she's lost the need to put on an act. But I'm sure she's still directing a fake smile to the proficient adventurers up there."

Some sort of problem seemed to have happened in-between them. When I asked for the details, it seems during that past monster army matter, Erhart's party had stated their desire to participate.

And she had obstinately put a stop to it.

For requests outside the city walls, the rewards were extraordinary. Perhaps they were attracted by those prospects when they insisted on their participation, but it would've been best they hadn't.

In the worst case, they could have died.

Trying to dispel a misunderstanding, I was about to open my mouth, when Milleia-san's voice came from the Jewel

『Lyle, now's not the time. It looks like the blood's rushed to their heads, and no matter what you say to them, they won't accept it. Let them grow a bit more as people, until they're able to have a laugh over the matter. If they keep on living as adventurers, the day they can laugh will surely come. You'd do best to tell them once that time comes. They do look like they have the skill… that Marianne kid who built up their foundations so far must have been raising them with care.』

I wondered if it was alright to leave the misunderstanding standing, but it was certain that Erhart's party felt quite strongly about it. I didn't think my words would do anything about it.

(Perhaps she was to them what Dalien's receptionist Hawkins-san was to me?)

I reminisced a little. His simple presence cast pressure on his surroundings, but I recalled how he politely and dealt with everyone.

"I see…"

"Yes, that's right. Heard enough? It's our fault for getting deceived, end of story. Laugh if you want."

"I won't laugh. Thank you for telling me."

Since I was able to hear out their story, I gave my thanks. The extra servings they ordered were carried at just the right time, so as if to forget a sad tale, Erhart's party turned their attention to the food before their eyes.

## ❼

A day off.

Having gone out for shopping, I took May and Monica to the

marketplace.

Having returned from the Labyrinth subjugation, we finished inspecting our equipment, and putting in requests for their maintenance. I set the days until we could accept the next request as break days.

At the marketplace with much pedestrian traffic, I carried bags for Monica, as she bought one ingredient after the next. Rather than meat and fish and vegetable, she was mainly purchasing seasonings.

“Hah, I really wanted to go alone with the damn chicken. The mansion has those pieces of junk, and those mass produced pieces of junk, and those three mass produced defects, so I can’t flirt around with my Chicken Dickwad there…”

The one Monica spilled her complaints to was May. When we said we were heading to the market, she said she’d tag along. Her eyes were sparkling as she looked around.

As I carried a brown paper sack of groceries, I turned to Monica, who was diagonally behind me.

“When have I ever flirted with you?”

“Don’t be so embarrassed. I, Monica, can understand a chicken’s affection. Even if you swing about violence, within my databanks, they are all but expressions of love.”

“No, violence isn’t happening. I don’t want that sort of love.”

Pulling back from her statement, I turned my eyes to May. Showing her shoulders and navel, a tight, mini-skirtish garment.

In Beim, the passersby didn’t show much interest, but in other downs, she and Monica both gathered some glances.

May was looking at a rare fruit.

“What’s that! Hey, what’s that!”

The aunty manning the fruit stand explained with a smile.

“They’re a fruit delivered from a place across the ocean. You can’t eat the skin, but cutting it in half, and scooping its insides out with a spoon is the standard way to ear it.”

Its surface was black, or a dark purple? Taking such a fruit in hand, Monica looked over it.

“Oh my, you even have something like this. Let’s purchase it.”

As she purchased a few of them, the aunty looked to me holding the baggage, she packed them away in a small bag, and inserted it into my brown paper sack.

“Girly, here’s a freebie. Come again.”

Since May had stopped, and we had made a purchase, the woman handed may one of the same fruits we had bought as a freebie.

May looked quite happy upon accepting it. She held it up in both hands, and seemed as if she was looking forward to eating it on the spot.

I looked over the fruit lined at the stant.

“You really can get anything in Beim.”

There, the woman laughed in a loud voice.

“Well of course! This is the more developed city on the continent. It isn’t even going to lose to a metropolis of any massive country out there.”

I gave a smile. The Seventh let out some thorny lines.

『Oh I’m sure. Wringing money and resources and blood out from the countries around it, it’s a city that’s flourishing from the profit. Truly a dreadful land.』

But the aunty’s expression clouded just a little.

“It’s just, I heard Rusworth and Galleria are going to start a war again. We’ll start getting more things we’d usually never get our hands on again. Those two countries sure are troubling.”

Rusworth and Galleria were two countries that had been at war with each other for many years. At present, they were stationed across from Lorphys.

The Third let out a reluctant voice.

『Really? At such a busy time? It's normal to wait for fall to pass before you go to war. Or could it be the harvest season changes by country?』

Of the feudal lords that remained, the territory's scale was smallest in the Third's era. He raised a discontent voice at those off-season movements.

But the Fourth was different.

『They're considerable large countries. Maybe they're well enough off to keep up the form? There are matters that don't require much mobilization. I'm sure they have knights, and perhaps they can make up numbers by hiring mercenaries from the land over here.』

The Fifth sounded displeased on the Fourth's opinion.

『Hiring mercenaries costs money. Well, maybe they plan to plunder whatever ground they gain. Hah, how terrible.』

While I thought over it, May borrowed a knife from the fruit aunty, and cut the gruit in half. She handed one side to me.

"Here, for you."

"Eh? Oh, thank you."

Accepting it in my free hand, I found its insides were stuffed with fruit flesh. Its juice was overflowing, making my hand wet and sticky.

Biting in, its sweetness rendered me a little surprised.

"What could it be. It's a bit different from the fruits I know of."

May was of the same opinion..

"I know, right! It's delicious."

Monica looked at the two of us.

“It’s a fruit from southern lands. Has a real tropical feel to it.”

There, the woman looked at Monica and laughed.

“So you knew of it? Well, it’s true that southern fruits have a characteristic taste. I see, it really is… tropical?”

Monica smiled.

“It means it came from the tropics.”

That didn’t really help, I thought, as I continued shopping with the two of them.

I gave my thanks to the aunty.

“Thank you. We’ll definitely stop by again.”

“Thanks for the fruit!”

May also smiled as she waved her hand. But my thanks weren’t just about the fruit.

(Galleria and Rusworth, huh. It may be the time to make contact with them.)

# 3 - LYLE

… In the Guild's changing room, Rühe looked at her own uniform.

Its skirt was a little short, and it had been made flashier than what the other receptionists wore.

Taking it in her hands, she breathed out a sigh. Around her were other female receptionists changing their clothing.

Those near her wore not the chest-emphasizing clothes Marianne had worn up to now, wearing exceedingly normal ones in their stead.

Taking a sidelong glance at them, Rühe looked back at her own uniform.

"That's right, my breasts may not be big, but… did they really have to give me a shorter skirt to compensate?"

Letting out complaints, she slipped into her receptionist uniform.

After she finished changing, she headed for the reference room on her way to the counter. It was to confirm the data on the adventurers she was charged with. And taking the data on their request success rate and evaluations, she was to make use of them at her desk.

Exiting the reference room, Rühe made her way to the room the Guild Cards were stored. In it, the cards for the adventurers designated to newbie training were kept separately.

She checked each one, and made sure their silver cards didn't have a single blemish on the names. Since the adventurer she got along with had perished, Rühe had made it a habbit to commute to that room.

With a load of data in her hands, she turned to leave the room, only to run into Marianne at the doorway.

"… Ah."

With Rühe's small build, she had to look up see her.

“Oh, did you come to check them?”

Keeping her smile, she lowered her head to Marianne, and left. For all she’d made fun of her, she couldn’t look her in the eyes anymore.

She had bragged of how she got along with a proficient adventurer, yet Marianne was stuck with newbies… what’s more, she had made fun of the very fact Marianne was in charge of the guild designated new recruits.

When her acquaintances’ party had suffered a heavy blow altogether, leaving only one survivor behind, the talks came to her about training fresh recruits herself.

And after brooding for a while, Rühe had accepted the offer.

Hurriedly showing her face behind the lines of counters, she greeted the supervisor on duty.

“Good morning.”

Her superior looked at her, and smiled.

“Yeah, Morning. You’re a little early. Your counter isn’t vacant yet, so why not talk a bit before you take over?”

“S-sure.”

Whenever the counters rotated shifts, there was a rule among receptionists to take over the previous station’s work. There was still a little time before that was to happen, so her superior had called her to a halt.

She showed her a number of documents.

“The truth is, there are a few new adventurers I’d like you to look after. They’re young, but there are quite a few parties of twos and threes. See, our neighbors are in a bit of a panic since Bahnseim rushed in, and there are quite a few people who ran our way.”

In a land that was once a neighboring country, Bahnseim’s army was already stationed and governing. After subjugating the monsters, they were busily moving around with surveying the land.

Within all that, those that had lost their places to be. And those that lost their statuses had flowed into Beim.

“T-this many?”

Of the numerous pages, one of them detailed the present state of the neighboring country.

All the others were tightly packed with the small-print names of the new adventurers who had signed up at the East Branch.

Her superior offered an explanation.

“No, at the start, you just have to offer an explanation. We’ll also do an introductory meeting, but there are plenty of youths who’ll get tricked by the big city, and find themselves rolling in an alleyway by tomorrow. Have them work a few times, and we’ll get some parties short on hands to call out to them. Anyways, just know you won’t need to look after all of them.”

When she heard the entire force would be dealing with them, Rühe felt relieved. The adventurers she already had under her were already beyond her, and she couldn’t look after such a large addition.

“That’s a relief. Anymore will be…”

Looking at Rühe, the superior nodded.

“Well, with all their insufficiencies, managing newbies is quite a trial. The managers also have to consider a lot when they send jobs around to them. Do your best. If there’s anything you don’t know, just ask Marianne.”

After giving a bitter smile, Rühe parted with her superior, and headed for the front counter…

## ❼

… After lunch.

Having finished her break, and returned to the counter, Rühe faced

adventurers who'd returned from a request.

Making sure not to let her smile die out, and taking many good looks at her opponents, she dealt with them.

"T-that's no good. Abandoning a request part-way through. In that case, the Guild can't offer a reward, you know?"

In her head, she wanted to apologize to the requester for sending the request to such useless new adventurers. The fact she would likely actually have to go apologize on her next day off made Rühe's head hurt.

The two-man adventurer party before her eyes sat in their chairs with the grime still on them. Putting an arm on the counter, one spoke in regards to her.

"Even if you say it like that, it's just troubling. We did half of it, so fork over half."

As they sluggishly demanded the reward, the adventures lined up behind them began branching off from her line, and moving to different counters.

The flow of people was completely different around Rühe's counter alone.

(What not? This isn't going smoothly at all. They're all going off to other counters…)

Just because she was the newbie charge, that didn't mean she wasn't to deal with other adventurers. If it was busy enough, she would work with them, and if she was free, it was only natural she would help. Keeping adventurers waiting, and getting behind on work was troublesome to the Guild as well.

Her opponents were youths who had become adventurers a few months prior. Younger than Rühe, but their tones were as if they were looking down on her from above.

"Hey, can't you be just a bit more flexible? We don't want to be here anymore than you do. Hand off half, and it all ends, right?"

With many instances of troublesome behavior, they had been placed under newbie rearing. At the start, they had worked normally, but perhaps having come from the countryside, after getting a little bit of money in their hands, they had gotten to playing around with it.

“If you don’t fulfill the request, you don’t get the reward. Be it half, or eighty percent, there are some things they simply aren’t allowed.”

No matter how many times she explained it, the two of them weren’t satisfied.

Their voices gradually became rougher.

“You’re supposed to be in charge of us, right? Then do your job properly.”

“And let me just tell you today’s requestor was the absolute worst. He kept sending strange jobs around to us. And he kept shouting, ‘take this seriously,’ and ‘don’t rest,’ never shut up.”

To the two who had started standing out with their troublesome conduct, Rühe desperately explained.

“And isn’t that natural if you sit down and stop working outside of break times…”

When her tone got a little rougher as well, one of the adventurers clicked his tongue.

“Che, the hell’s this. When it’s our money that’s putting food on your table. Hah, the last newbie instructor was a huge-jugged beauty, yet we get stuck with a shorty like you? Just doesn’t motivate me at all.”

Rühe hung her head.

Long ago, when she herself was a newbie, she recalled how her paperwork was slow, and there were times the adventurers would yell at her.

(Come to think of it, back then, the one who helped me was him.)

She remembered the adventurer who’d died.

As that was going on, the surrounding receptionists approached to

follow through for her. But before they could, a voice came from behind the adventurers.

“… How long you going ‘ta lounge about there? When I thought I found an empty line, you guys just keep hogging it, saying the same things over and over again. I’m in a hurry here. Why not think for a second?”

Behind them was Erhart. In the same tank top as ever, with a large sword over his back.

The two stood, and glared at him, but Erhart had his comrades. His party members gathered, their equipment on a different level from the party of two.

“What, you want to fight?”

When Erhart threatened them, the adventurers hurriedly left the counter. In the first place, they had failed at their request, and therefore hadn’t brought the necessary paperwork.

When they left the guild in a rush, a staff member approached Erhart’s party.

“This is troubling. Personal strife between adventurers on the Guild’s premise is strictly forbidden.”

When the bespectacled male receptionist cautioned him, Erhart scratched his head.

“S-sorry for that.”

But continuing on with his reprimand, the receptionist…

“In that case, finish up your business here.”

Without blaming him any further, he released Erhart’s party at once. The male receptionist approached Rühe.

“I apologize for not making it in time. When you have those sorts come in, step back, and rely on a receptionist with a scary face. Also, could you handle their paperwork?”

“Y-yes!”

When Rühe gave her reply, Erhart talked amongst his comrades, and parted to go to the counter alone.

Taking a seat in front of her desk, it seemed he had borrowed the Guild's showers. He handed a report over to Rühe.

Accepting it, she confirmed its contents.

(Monster subjugation around Beim, and an odd job request. The given evaluation is【B】.)

The report of Erhart's party, who'd returned from outside the city, was filled with relatively favorable assessments.

"Um, your evaluation is【B】. Splendid work. I'll prepare the reward at once, but what will you do about the next request?"

There, Erhart didn't show and signs of thinking particularly hard over it

"Battle was considerably rough this time around. We've got equipment inspection to take care of. But we've done two requests, so won't we be fine for a while? If equipment maintenance will take a while, I'll come and take some odd jobs within Beim. Yeah, I'll drop by again in the next three days."

"That would be a great help to us. What about the renewal of your Guild Cards?"

"I'll leave it to you before or after my next request."

When Rühe prepared the reward, Erhart took it, and confirmed the sum. He stood to leave.

"Thank you."

As he said that, and returned to his comrades, Rühe watched off his back…

❼

When I dropped by the East Branch, the atmosphere of the first

floor lobby was a little restless.

I wondered what it was, but thinking I could just find out by asking someone, I decided to proceed to the third floor with Clara.

It seems Clara had sensed the Guild's off air as well.

"It seems somewhat fun down there."

I nodded.

"Right. When we confirm our requests, how about we try asking?"

I entered a free room on the third floor to find Tanya-san waiting.

We sat in our seats, and confirmed the contents of the available requests in that private room. But Tanya-san explained them with a relatively serious look on her face.

The gaze she gave beyond her glasses felt sharped than usual.

"Thank you for making your way here. You've come at just the right time."

Even if you say that, from our point of view, I could only think we came at the wrong time. Clara looked at me, and told me to, 'refuse if she brings up a strange request'.

"Did something happen? Another Labyrinth?"

Tanya-san shook her head to the side. Her silky black hair swayed.

"Unfortunately not. Rather, we're still in the middle of subjugating some at present. Before your party left, another one came out. The South Branch was a little perplexed, but we didn't have enough adventurers on hand."

That must be rough. I thought, but we had our circumstances as well. Accepting any request she suggested would be impossible.

"If it's a request we can take, we'll accept it."

"Yeah, it will probably be alright."

She gave a sarcastic smile. When I asked the situation…

“Transport?”

“Yes, from Beim to Galleria, and to Rusworth, the transport of cargo. Our last shipment, with the preparations for that defensive war, we weren’t able to carry all of it. If you’ll take up the guard and transport as well, you will receive a bonus.”

Looking at the figure she displayed, Clara nodded.

It wasn’t a bad amount.

But with the distance, we would have to be away from Beim for a while.

From the Jewel, the Fifth let his voice.

『Two warring countries receive care packages from Beim. Could our cargo be weapons?』

She just said cargo, but the contents was likely commodities. I didn’t have a problem with the cargo itself, but I did have an interest in the two countries.

“You won’t use a sea route?”

Tanya-san spoke.

“They’ve only got small ports between them. And neither country wishes to construct one.”

With their proximity to Beim, two whole countries without much coast is rare. Could it be they can’t secure good locations?

I took the papers in hand, and told Tanya-san we’d take it up.

“Understood. We’ll accept the request.”

She looked relieve.

“Thank the goddess. Your place is able to carry large loads of cargo, after all.”

It does seem she looked into the large-scale Porter. It stood out at the very point Damien drove it to Beim, so there was no helping it.

Clara looked over the documents.

“Are we the only adventurers taking part?”

Tanya-san nodded.

“I doubt there would be many to lay hands on shipments to those two countries, but it’s a relief if we can put proficient adventurers on guard. Also, if it’s you, Lyle-kun, it’s possible you’ll get some accommodation while passing through Lorphys.”

So the fact I was there held meaning.

(Come to think of it, up to this point, they had to commute through Selva, right? If I made a route, did they think they’ll get favorable accommodations henceforth?)

I could use it to boldly enter both countries, so I decided not to mind it.

(… After this, should I hit a bookstore, and then a café? But that isn’t any different from usual, is it.)

Finalizing the request, I mulled over where to detour on my way back with Clara.

## ❼

… Inside the Jewel.

Milleia opened the door to Lyle’s room of memories, and walked in.

It was the room Lyle had once been confined within the Walt house mansion. The bedroom had a toilet and bath attached, life complete in that room alone.

A bookshelf occupied one full wall, yet unable to contain the influx of books, they were spilling onto the floor.

Closing the door behind her, Milleia looked over the room.

『As the room of the next head, it isn’t quite…』

Suddenly sensing a presence, she took just one step forward.

『… Appropriate. Did I get it right?』

She heard the voice of a child. Turning, and looking down, she found the form of a young boy looking up at her.

Blue hair, and blue eyes. Pale skin. It wasn't the matured form she was used to looking it, a childish body.

That boy was looking up at her face with a smile, standing behind her before she even realized it.

『Predicting a person's words and saying them before they can is quite rude. And appearing behind them before they realize it is also distasteful. Now then, why did you do such things… Lyle-kun?』

The young boy's name was Lyle. His age was perhaps around ten? Smiling, the boy put his hands behind his heads, and spoke.

『Because I had interest in the contents of your skirt. It's just the mischief of a child, so won't you forgive it?』

Seeing the boy say that with such a cute face, Milleia was a little bewildered.

『It's not like I didn't know, but your personalities are too different.』

Leaning forward to meet his eyes, she lightly flicked his forehead.

『Is it no good? I'm serious here. I seriously want to see what sort of panties you're wearing. It's something I can only ever do in my child years!』

『Hah… it's no good. You mustn't do such a thing. While I'm at it, you're only taking on the form of a child, aren't you, Lyle-kun?』

『… You've got no openings. Well, you telling me not to just makes me want to even more. I shall definitely flip that skirt of yours someday.』

Seeing child Lyle's face brimming with confidence…

『Why are they *this* different? Rather, you're much too different from

Lyle's actual child years as well.』

When Milleia said that, Lyle ran off to prepare a chair in the room. He wiped off its top with a handkerchief, and brushed off the dust, before offering it to Milleia, and taking a seat on the bed himself.

Milleia said her thanks, before lowering herself into the chair.

『Now then, will you be teaching this and that to Lyle now?』

The child Lyle gave an intrepid smile atop the bed.

『If he asks, I'll answer. And I'll even give him advice. But my true goal is…』

Light streamed into the room from a window, but everywhere else was dim.

In that dim room, a childish Lyle let his eyes shine, his mouth form the shape of a crescent moon, and showed off his white teeth.

Milleia felt something strange run through her.

『… To discern him. The current Lyle shall be discerned by LYLE, and if I find him no good, I'll be snatching away his 'self'. Well, to be more precise, I'd really be returning it to him.』

A young Lyle… no, LYLE gave a delightful grin…

# 4 - Lyle an LYLE

We had taken on a large-scale cargo guarding request.

Passing through Lorphys, we would make deliveries to Galleria and Rusworth, in that order. But both countries were in a tense state of alert.

It was a pain, but after entering Galleria, we would return to Lorphys, before entering Rusworth from there. It was a necessary pain.

Confirming the plan, I decided to send some documents to Lorphys about our passage from my side as well.

And the one I was to entrust the papers to…

"… I just got back, you know?"

In the mansion's parlor, Alette-san sat on the sofa making an enervated expression. By the request of the East Branch, she had gone Labyrinth clearing, and it seems she had just returned yesterday.

It wasn't a very large Labyrinth, and the subjugation itself was finished in no time. But upon surveying the aria, they found it was possible to cultivate a new village there, so she had to take on a few more detailed tasks at the site.

I made a serious expression.

"I'm making a relatively serious plea. It's an opportunity to enter both Galleria and Rusworth, as Beim's transport convoy… well, we're just guarding merchants. Personally, I want to see the states of both countries."

Alette-san let out a sigh.

"Alliance, or union, was it? If you get the cooperation of four countries, then it's true this area is sure to stabilize. Even if there are

other small countries around, based on the conditions, you can take them in. But listen here, I do think those two countries are no good."

By her impression, both countries were heavily unified.

Galleria was a country where the feudal lord with the most power served as a representative. The other lords, in order to oppose Rusworth, were never frugal with their assistance to that representative.

In contrast, Rusworth was managed as a single territory. Without any feudal lords, governors were dispersed.

And it seems they had a stable, centralized control.

"… Those two, for whatever reason, have a lot of skirmishes. And every time, the two maidens of war come out, and go at it one on one. They're overwhelming strengths that others dare not intrude on. Until I saw them, I thought there would be a way to fight them, but even I would likely be cut down in a manner of seconds."

Alette-san wasn't weak. More than that, she should be classified as strong. If even she couldn't cross blades, then they certainly must not be normal opponants.

"Are their Skills powerful?"

Alette-san took a sip of tea, and place the cup on the table, before lurching forward.

"No, they're plainly strong. If there were people destined for strength from birth, then I'm sure they're people like those girls. Those sorts of humans just normally exist. Their direct battles and magics are way above the norm. Not to mention their Skills are Rear Guard Class. Meaning they're specialized to magic."

Making a selection of magic solidify as your own original was the characteristic of Rear Guard Skills. Original magic was difficult to deal with, and quite troublesome.

I put a hand to my chin.

"Any countermeasures?"

“Not happening. I’ve confirmed it with my eyes, and that’s not happening. Did you know… humans… they dance through the sky. The humans hit by their magics are thrown out into the atmosphere. The cloud of dust was sky high. It felt as if they were showing off our difference in ability.”

Seeing Alette-san fall into a slump, I felt something cold flow down my back.

From the Jewel, a care-free Fourth let his voice.

『You think they’re monster class? Put next to Celes, I wonder which would be more troublesome.』

It really would be troubling if there were Celes-level monsters littered all over the place. But a strong interest in those two women was coming out in me. If I could make an alliance, they would be a strong hand to play.

Having them destroy each other would be troubling. I wanted to get their cooperation somehow.

“… I’ll try to get in contact with them.”

Alette-san looked at me.

“You’re adding to the harem again? Then just take our princess already…”

She grumbled out the last part, but I pretended I didn’t hear it.

## ❼

As preparations were underway.

I was called into the Jewel. For some reason, everyone was gathered in front of my room of memories.

Milleia-san looked more troubled than usual, and at the same time, the Seventh was holding his head.

The Third looked lost in thought, while the Fifth looked at me with a

somewhat doubtful gaze. And looking at me, the Fourth…

『Lyle, it's best you resolve yourself today.』

"What's this, all of a sudden?"

The atmosphere he gave off was diferent than usual, so I hesitated. Milleia-san came up to me.

『Lyle… have you ever thought to flip up a woman's skirt?』

… Even if you suddenly ask me that, just how am I supposed to respond? I get the feeling laughing, and declaring, 'or course~' isn't quite right here. And seriously denying it would just be more suspicious.

"No, I've no idea what you're trying to say."

Milleia-san put a hand to her face, and tilted her head. It seems she wanted to say something as she looked at me, but after a while, she removed the hand, and nodded a couple of times.

『Well, you'll understand once you meet him. Shall we be off?』

Hearing that, I recalled how Septem-san had disappeared last time around. She had said the Jewel would prepare a different individual.

"Has the next person to explain appeared? Who is it?"

I sent a look around to Milleia-san and the ancestors, but everyone was making dubious faces.

"… Isn't today's atmosphere a little bit strange?"

There, the Fifth pointed to my room.

『Enter, and you'll see.』

Sure enough, I thought, putting my hand on the doorknob. For a moment, I thought perhaps Celes would come out, but by the ancestors' reactions, that didn't feel right.

Taking a deep breath, I opened the door.

# ❼

… Novem dropped by Lyle's room.

The time was evening. The preparations for dinner were complete, and she had come to inform Lyle it was time to eat.

Lyle's work room was where Novem and the vestiges of the mansion's master… a pitiful existence formed of assimilated monsters had fought.

The master's office, or perhaps library, was a splendid room. When she entered it, she found Lyle lying on top of the sofa.

She had knocked the door a few times, but there was no response. She had felt a presence within, so she entered, and seeing Lyle asleep, Novem smiled, and looked for something to cover him with.

The season was summer. Perhaps a towel would be enough.

She thought, as she searched the room. As expected, the well-prepared Monica had prepared a towel blanket. Draping it over Lyle, Novem looked at the light glow of the Jewel.

"It's shining again…"

Novem knew of how Lyle could send his mind to the Jewel like this. In the past, in the middle of a Labyrinth Subjugation, he had brought the entire party into it, and had them fight, so she was sure she her theory wasn't wrong.

And she had seen it coming, to an extent. She had anticipated it countless times to that point, but she first held conviction in the notion when Lyle fought with Tressy on the ship's deck.

In the boy's fighting figure from behind, Novem saw the traces of the First Generation, Basil Walt.

"Lyle-sama, give your ancestors my regards, okay?"

Saying that, Novem stroked Lyle's face…

# ❼

A room of memory.

My room of memory was fulfilling its purpose for, perhaps I should say, the first time.

It was the room I was confined for five years. The bedroom, and the yard you could see from it, were the spaces I was permitted to move in.

It had an excessive amount of books, and I could see an individual taking a book from the mountainous pile. The young boy had the same blue hair and eyes at me.

But he wasn't a memory. He started making an address my way.

『If I have to say, I really like them big. Perhaps it's mother's influence? She had large breasts, after all. But you see, recently, I've gotten around to thinking that small breasts have a unique sort of flavor in themselves.』

While letting his eyes pass through some books on magic, that 'something' that took on the form of my younger years began talking about… something.

"Who are you?"

I pressed my right hand against my chest, and clenched my clothing. As a strange sweat broke out, the boy turned to me.

He greeted me with a smile.

『Pleasure to meet you. Or would it be best to say it's been a while? I'm you, and you're me. But maybe you aren't me anymore. To make it simple, I'm the memories sealed by my cute sister Celes, and another personality. Memories are a form of personality… they're a large factor that influences one's character. Memories are experience. Meaning after losing those memories, you were born, and the one who knew that, I, was born as well. No, since I do carry on the memories, perhaps I'm closer to the original than you?』

The form of myself around ten, while the boy spoke in a childish voice, he explained in a mature tone.

“Cute Celes? And personality?”

When I sent a glance to Milleia-san in the room, the boy burst into laughter. Milleia-san just looked at me, and told me it was, ‘alright’.

『Goddess, it’s because you always turn to women like that, that you’re treated like a gigolo. Well, I’m a pretty boy, so it’s only natural they help me. But at the rate you’re going, their affection will run dry.』

The laughing young boy put down his book, walked through the room, and prepared a chair. The insides of the room were dusty, because it was an area the servants didn’t really want to clean.

Thinking back, just what sort of lifestyle was I living?

Using a handkerchief to wipe off the seat portion, the boy recommended for us… me and Milleia-san to sit. The individual himself lowered himself onto the bed.

Taking a seat, I took a serious look at him, and opened my mouth.

“So what is it you want to tell me? What does the Jewel plan on telling me through you?”

He looked a little up, and crossed his legs on the bed.

『Nothing particularly? On the contrary, do you have any questions? If it’s something I can answer, I’ll answer all you want.』

Questioned for questions, I asked what had been bothering me. I had loads of things I wanted to ask, but what was first on my mind were those words.

“What do you mean by cute Celes? Doesn’t she hate me…”

『Yep, she hates me. But I’m Celes’ big brother. So I’ll treat her as a brother would. I mean, Celes is my cute little sister. Whether I smiled or gave thanks, Celes always resented me. Resenting and envying, carrying something dark in the depths of her heart.』

Hearing that, I was astonished.

“… So you knew the whole time?”

『Yep! I mean, I love my family, after all. I wanted to save her from those emotions someday, but in the end, I was unable.』

I shook my head to the side. I couldn’t think the me of my sealed memories was the same as the current me. The me before my eyes was someone else.

Without maturing forward, his time had stopped at ten years of age.

(Did I… used to be like this?)

As I found it strange, the boy before my eyes made a bit of a troubled face, and averted his eyes.

『Ah, don’t misunderstand it. I am me, and I’m not the past me. The memories sealed and locked away, I’ve come to see you. So I’ll say it, but in a sense, we’re different people. In the first place, I’m not a wimp like you, after all.』

I thought.

(What’s this… I don’t quite like him.)

He smiled and asked, ‘anything else?’ so I continued asking what was on my mind.

“Why did Celes hate me? And why did she do such a thing?”

Looking down with a bit of a sorrowful expression, the boy let out a sigh.

『I was soft. It was my mistake. Well, rather than Celes being skillful, she managed to conceal Agrissa sealed within the yellow Jewel. Behind her smile, she had gotten her hands on it. Maybe she was thinking of when to take the castle from me the whole time? I think Novem would be the more knowledgeable on that subject.』

I heard Novem’s name, but that one didn’t surprise me. I knew she carried on the memories of some Goddess or evil god.

So she must know something, and she must be hiding something.

“I’ll confirm it with Novem eventually. I realize I need to have a proper talk with her. But it won’t be too late after learning everything…”

There, the boy before my eyes gave a smile that sent shivers down my spine. Even when he was smiling, a cold sweat was flowing down my back. He had the same presence as Celes.

Standing from the chair, I was pointing a weapon at him before I even realized it.

『After learning everything? Good grief, you sure say some soft things. Drag it out from her mouth as soon as you can. And it’s possible you’ll never learn everything, you know?』

Milleia-san stood, and stepped out in front of me.

『LYLE-kun.』

Calling the boy with my name, he… LYLE shrugged his shoulders, and lowered his characteristic aura.

『Good goddess, you’re scary when you’re angry, Milleia-san. But it looks like your ability to charm women is above mine, to say the least.』

As he said something I wasn’t happy to hear, I was convinced.

“So Septem-san… Septem’s powers have been passed down to me as well?”

But LYLE looked taken aback.

『What? It’s because I’m a pretty boy. It isn’t any goddess’ powers. It’s because I’m cool that the women flock to me. Don’t mistake that part. Otherwise, women would never gather around a wimp like you. Rather, the current you is the leftovers without the knowledge or power of a goddess, you hear.』

“… I think I hate you.”

When I let out my true feelings, LYLE also smiled and nodded.

『I really hate you too. It's mutual!』

Even when I glared at him, he didn't falter. Faltering aside, he began explaining what I had wanted to ask.

『It's not like I know everything either. What I do know is my past, and yours. I do apologize for saying it, but I'm more talented than you. Of all else, I inherited just a bit of the goddess Septem's memories. Rather than memories, should I call it knowledge? How to manipulate Mana, and an understanding of what Mana was in itself.』

"Mana? Mana is Mana, right?"

LYLE shook his head.

『Mana is poison to humans. No, it's poison to all forms of life. Ask Novem about that field, why don't you. I'm none too knowledgeable about that part. But I did know Mana. So I was knowledgeable in body strengthening, and magic. I knew, so I could use it well. On top of that, I had the talent.』

I turned my face to Milleia-san, and pointed at LYLE.

"Milleia-san, this isn't me. I don't think I was ever this cheeky brat."

Milleia-san gave a bitter smile.

『Ye~ah, I think so too, but…』

There, LYLE made a protest. Not in opposition to my opinion, he angrily agreed.

『Why of course! I'm me. From the moment I was born, I was【Lyle Walt】. But you were born【Lyle Walt】once everything was taken from you. Don't group us together.』

I opened my eyes wide.

"You, you mean to say that I'm…"

『Right. You're a fake. And I'm the one that's closest to the original. So I'd like you to return it; my body.』

The boy moved right in front of me in an instant. His movements

exceeded Celes.

When I promptly tried to retreat, Milleia-san forced her way between us. Her eyes glowed gold, and while her standing posture was normal, there was a pressure to it.

LYLE brought both hands behind his head.

『Oh my oh my, oh my oh my. Even Milleia-san's on that side? Good grief, it looks like you've at least got it in you to make Novem fall. Even I wasn't enough for that one.』

From behind Milleia-san, I asked LYLE.

"What? From back then, Novem was–"

『That's also wrong. More than that, it looks like you really do trust Novem. Could it be imprinting? I'll throw this out there, but Novem always took a fixed distance when she interacted with me and Celes. Even when I called out to her, her reactions were faint. She was no easy game, such to a level that within my head, I got around to calling her【Iron Fortress Novem】.』

Novem took distance from me? Why did she do that? In that case, why did I think Novem was always kind to me? No, in the first place… I'm a fake?

As I lost myself in thought, Milleia-san hugged me tightly.

『Calm down. If you don't keep your heart firm, you really will be taken over.』

LYLE was laughing. Laughing, and sitting on the bed.

『Whoops, it's almost time. Now then, anything else you'd like to ask? I guess I could answer one more for you.』

Looking at the existence before my eyes, I tried to ask something. But in my confusion, no questions were coming up. And I was getting to hate the existence before my eyes.

There, the existence in front of me overlapped with another self of mine.

“You… could it be when I’m experiencing Growth, you’re taking over my body!?”

There, LYLE made a dubious expression. Taking some fleeting glances at me. But while he was at it, I felt some sort of pity… a detestable feeling.

『I get where you’re coming from, but I’m irrelevant. No, maybe I am, but that’s you, without a doubt. Even for me, a mr. lyle state is a little… sorry, I can’t defend the idea. Really, I’m sorry.』

“N-no, I mean I’m different, and you’re…”

『Look here. I’m a memory, and I’ve been sealed. I have a general grasp of what’s going on outside, but it’s impossible for me to go out. I can’t influence anything from within the Jewel either. So I’m sure you don’t want to admit it, but… that’s you. Well, I understand the desire to pin it on someone else, but… ah, do you want to just make it my fault? I think that’ll be a load off your back.』

Seeing the existence before my eyes, LYLE, give an honest apology, I thought.

“Stop, don’t apologize for real. Don’t console me for real! And wait, I hate you!”

On top of the bed, LYLE smiled, and tilted his head.

『So do I.』

He said. He looked truly delighted as he said it.

# 5 - Galleria

Galleria… its official name was the【Grand Duchy of Galleria】.

It was a country where, among its varied feudal lords, the one that held the most power, the Grand Duke of Galleria, had the role of getting the surrounding lords together.

The Grand Duke's dukedom alone held more territory than Lorphys' had before the war. But the greatest marvel of the country was of how the authority of a duke was recognized by surrounding lords.

After departing from Beim, we entered Lorphys, and upon crossing into Galleria from there, I could tell the atmosphere was different.

It was a country centralized around nobility, and one where the feudal lords held great power.

Sitting on Porter's roof portion, I guarded the specially prepared carts, and the large-scale Porter- quite a conspicuous group- as I watched over the convoy that had stopped to complete the troublesome international passage procedures.

"… It really is a troublesome process."

The one to answer my murmur was the Third.

『There's no helping it. But once they verify it's a delivery for the Grand Duke's house, they'll let us through for chump's change, so just wait it out. They've agreed to barter entry for the Magic Stones and materials we obtained on the way, so it even reduces our load.』

The Valkyries stationed to protect the group wore robes, and carried their varied specialized weapons to appeal.

When monsters attack, they'd instantly respond, and annihilate them. And carrying out the dismantling, they'd retrieve the stones and materials as well.

『The feudal lords having power was the same in Bahnseim, but this

land is the extremes of that. As a country, it has a questionable size, so even a baronet house would seem large… being a baronet here sounds quite profitable. Seems you'd have a considerable amount of influence to boot.』

The Third sounded envious, but even so, from my point of view, there were numerous problems. The feudal lords were managing their territories, so there were places where the roads were maintenanced, and places where they weren't.

Every time we passed through a town, a passage toll would be taken.

Because we were using their roads, we would have to pay for it.

… I could only see it as an overly inconvenient country.

We passed through a number of territories, and even before we could enter the Grand Duke's territory, the merchants had to negotiate with the nobles.

"With the scale of your convoy, the fee would be around…"
"No, but we're delivering goods to the Grand Duke, so…"
"The value of bartered goods fluctuates, so please pay in gold…"

What I heard was just how much they were paying. And negotiations to how cheap they could lower it. Using the magic stones and materials gained on the way, the merchants were able to pass for cheaper than anticipated.

But thinking of the return trip made my forehead exceedingly painful. If we were to use the same course back, they would take our profits.

What's more, you couldn't move between Galleria and Rusworth.

It seems the merchants were keeping the toll in mind, and selling their goods for comparatively high prices, but to the buyers, the Grand Duke house, it must be quite an annoyance.

The Fourth quietly let out complaints.

『Road maintenance of this level requires that much gold? What's

more, there were plenty of check points in dubious places. Wherever there's a lot of traffic, they use every chance to pluck money off of us. If they made it cheaper, and actually put the work into maintaining the roads, they'd earn several times what they're making, dammit. What are they thinking, there lords? Are they idiots?』

In regards to territory management, he had formed the foundation among the heads of history, and it seems he was quite displeased with Galleria's system of rule.

『Manage it properly!』

The Seventh was opposed to the Fourth's opinion.

『It's irrelevant to us. Well, I do feel it's inefficient, but this isn't our territory. You're paying undo mind to it.』

At the very least, Bahnseim was a country set in order with the king at the center. It had a level of uniformity to it.

"So even with the same general structure, they can be different."

Sitting on the same roof, Miranda answered to my muttering. From my words, it seems she noticed I was comparing Bahnseim to Galleria.

"Sure it'll differ from a large superpower. But it's true the feudal lords have much power here. It seems they don't have anything like Imperial Nobles here. Can barely believe it myself."

Galleria's Grand Duke House didn't have any Imperial Nobles, it seems. The duke had his retainers, but they weren't treated as nobles, and they didn't have a peerage. It seems all of them were treated just as vassals.

"So it's a gathering of provincial nobles, huh."

Seeing that the group had started to move, I took control of Porter. Behind, Clara was piloting the large-scale Porter.

The soldiers that saw Porter were staring at us, but I ignored them, and passed through.

# ❼

After entering the Grand Duke's territory, since we were the ones who'd been called for, we didn't have to pay toll, and the other various expenses.

On the way to his manor, I found it strange he didn't own a palace. But the city around it was a fortress city nonetheless.

The walls around it were similar to Beim's, but it was of smaller scale, with a greater number of military installations.

Entering the city, we proceeded straight for the mansion.

There was no doubt the air of the city was different from Beim's but the fact it reminded me of Bahnseim was perhaps due to the similarity of their structures.

When the rare sight of Porter came through, a crowd formed, and the children looked up at the Golem with their eyes sparkling.

"No horses?"
"Maybe they're inside?"
"Idiot, in that case, where's the luggage going to go?"

Listening to the such voices from the residents, we made way for the mansion, when Eva restlessly popped up on Porter's roof.

"S-so many people… aah, I want to break into song."

As her eyes sparkled, and she insisted her desire of having her songs heard, I pushed her back into Porter.

"We don't have the time, so we can't. It seems a war is close here, so hold yourself back."

Not letting herself fall inside, with her head still pressed, she addressed me.

"You're always like that! There isn't a single time you're not busy! So I'm begging you. Just a little bit of time is enough."

Taken aback, I spoke.

“Aren’t you the one who said dealing with the local elves and organizations would be a pain? Please endure it. When we’re done with Rusworth, I’ll make some time in Lorphys.”

In these two unstable countries, it wouldn’t be strange if war broke out at any moment. In such a place, I didn’t want us to overstay our welcome.

“Wah, I knew it would be like this, but I’ve barely any chances.”

Spilling her complaints, Eva returned to Porter’s insides.

## ❼

The masses of cargo lowered from the wagons, and the large-scale Porter were lined up in front of the Grand Duke’s manor.

The one responsible came from the mansion, confirming each piece with the merchants.

They were mostly tools you wouldn’t use in war.

Among them, there were things that made one wonder, ‘why would they even need something like that?’ but I chose not to mind it.

The vast mansion was definitely appropriate for a Grand Duke. It was at the center of the country, so it wouldn’t be strange for him to have a castle, but thinking of living in it, this way was definitely easier.

The responsible party that confirmed the cargo issued orders to his subordinates to carry it away. There, a single woman walked out of the mansion.

That woman, who bore long silver hair, let her silky locks sway as she came over to us.

Her violet eyes, and white skin made me feel the beauty of some artificial creation from her. She wore clothes that a knight may wear, giving the impression she was trying to disguise as a man.

Her atmosphere was stiff. And she was of tall stature, suited to

military exploits.

When she walked over to me, she used her thumb to point out Porter.

“My apologies, but who would the owner of this article be? I’d like to talk with them.”

I took of my hood, and offered my greetings.

“My name is Lyle, and I’m the one in charge of this convoy’s security. I’m the owner.”

Monica was awaiting my orders nearby, and from her usual attitude, I thought she would butt in, but she kept her mouth closed, and erased her presence diagonally behind me.

(I-if she stayed this quiet on a regular basis, she’s be a perfect maid.)

The woman used her eyes to take me in from the tips of my toes, to the top of my head, before pushing out her large chest, and putting a hand on her hip.

“Are you an adventurer? I’m a little curious, but that doesn’t matter for now… I saw this one move. A wagon that needs no horse to pull it? So Beim’s even managed to develop something like this.”

What she had interest in was Porter.

And having her evaluate it made me a little happy.

“It hasn’t been marketed enough to catch on. And you would be?”

The surrounding people, especially the merchants were looking at me in panic. The people of the mansion were also looking at me with surprised expressions.

But the woman smiled.

“My apologies. I’m【Gracia Galleria】. I’m serving as proxy Grand Duke.”

I thought I had heard a description fitting her somewhere before, but

I never thought I would stumble upon one of the two maidens of war here of all places. Seeing her smile like that, I guess she does have a kind side to her…

“If we maintain these in large quantities, we’ll lessen the need for horses to pull our wagons. For that amount, we’ll be able to raise more warhorses, and flank Rusworth from all sides. Could you tell me of this one in more detail? If it will let me see that Rusworthen Witch’s face, I’ll purchase them at a pretty penny.”

Her violet eyes looked considerably serious. And seeing as she was smiling as she spoke of invasion, she was a war hawk.

From the Jewel, perhaps holding the same opinion, the Fifth.

『H-huh? CI thought these guys were fighting on set rules. You don’t mean to say they’ve been holding a serious war for years on end? That Alette wasn’t exaggerating it a bit?』

… He was confused.

The Seventh also drew back.

『A real war on this scale, is it? I’m surprised they didn’t pick at Selva when it was exhausted and collapsing.』

When I took a step back, my opponent took one forward. As she extended her hand to grab my shoulder, Monica, and Novem approached.

But from behind Gracia-san came a chastising voice.

“Gracia! You’re being rude to him, are you not!?”

Turning around, Gracia-san let out a sigh, and looked at the newcomer. She looked a little irritated.

“This isn’t a matter relevant to you, 【Leold】. You’ve gotten in the way.”

Silver hair, and drooping violet eyes. He seemed to be Gracia-san’s younger brother. Age-wise, he looked even younger than me.

When Gracia-san returned to the mansion, Leold-kun offered me an

apology.

“I deeply apologize. As you’ve witnessed, when it comes to war, my sister’s field of vision narrows… Ah, more importantly, I give my thanks for guarding the convoy. My name is Leold. I’m the younger brother of the proxy Grand Duke.”

I also introduced myself.

“I’m Lyle the adventurer. The guarding was a request, so it’s nothing you have to give your thanks for.”

There, Leold-kun lowered his eyes a little, and gave a bitter smile.

“No, most merchants and adventurers find their dissatisfactions on the way here.”

Watching Leold-kun’s response, the Fourth judged him.

『This kid… he’s a good kid at the base, but he’s no good. If she’s proxy, does that make this a male lineage? If he can’t inherit its status, rather than being too young, I can only think that he was found unworthy of it. And it’s no good to immediately give an apology as well. Just look around.』

I looked around to find the people of the mansion sending defiant gazes Leold-kun’s way.

The Third observed the surrounding situation.

『Big sister was too strong, so things have assembled with her at the center. But isn’t it strange? … These sorts of things usually don’t make for fun tales. It isn’t rare to be assassinated for being too strong. And little brother looks much easier to manipulate. For some reason, their unity feels weaker than what we’ve heard.』

Seeing the surroundings direct hostility, I sympathized with Leold-kun. I ended up overlapping him with me.

(Is he the same?)

Perhaps he noticed the surroundings looks, as he sent a smile at me, before returning to the mansion.

“My apologies. I was in the way, was I? Well then.”

In contrast to his sister Gracia-san’s military officer air, Leold-kun was a young boy with more a civil officer vibe to him. A contrastive pair of siblings, is it?

The merchants finished delivering the cargo, accepted the reward, and left the mansion. We the guards followed along, and after two nights in the city, we would return.

But of this country inclined to the extremes towards war, I felt a little… no, a considerable sense of doubt.

## ❼

… In Galleria’s Grand Duke’s mansion, Gracia had called Leold to her room.

The boy who would be rebuked if anything happened, Leold, was made light of by those of the manor.

A brother unworthy of his strong and beautiful sister. A brother unworthy of Grand Dukeship, and an environment that recognized that fact.

But…

“Leold, you don’t have to force yourself to follow through for me. You really don’t have to mind it.”

Gracia showed him an attitude different to what she usually wore around the mansion. It was the attitude of a sister worried for her brother.

Leold knew that as well.

“But at this rate, the other lords will keep squeezing out the merchants, and the prices will rise… when we’re already troubled with finances.”

At a glance, Galleria looked as if it had gathered its lords under the Grand Duke’s name.

But that wasn't the case.

They were using the Grand Dukke House to commence war with Rusworth.

"I understand your worry. But if you say too much by it, you'll definitely be assassinated. At present, I'm not asking for your opinion, so you're being looked upon lightly."

The lords had strong authority, and even by the Grand Duke's orders, if it was to cut into their precious income, they would revolt.

Gracia and Leold's parents had died of doubtful circumstance. Exhaustion by long years of war, and the decline of their national power couldn't be concealed. If the Grand Duke put on a show, no one would follow, and after so long, the Grand Duke couldn't cut itself off from its surroundings either.

The moment they did, the country would do the same, and its lands would instantly get stormy.

Gracia herself didn't actually wish for war. But the talent she was born with wouldn't permit it. As Galleria's maiden of war, the surroundings requested her to fight.

Originally, she wasn't supposed to stay a proxy, leaving the true title to Leold.

But Leold was stubborn as well. He believed that any further war was pointless, and was trying to make appeals to the feudal lords on the border.

If his appeals would actually get their assistance, then so be it, but it was uncertain to what extent they would actually listen. And to the lords that didn't hold a border, their plunder from war produced an extraordinary profit. If anyone asked to stop, it was a situation where ample resistance would pop up.

"Anyways, until you become an adult, I'm the proxy. But you should also think up a road to live free. As things are, you really will be killed."

Her words were ones to throw away the status of Grand Duke. But they were merely the words of a worried sister.

Leold spoke.

“… But if that’s the case, then you’ll be forcibly married off, won’t you? Have you forgotten how they said it was best if the maiden of war had as many children as possible in the last meeting? They seriously mean to push men onto you. That’s strange! You don’t even want to fight to begin with.”

Gracia understood her own strength. And perhaps that’s what the surrounding lords feared. But Gracia alone couldn’t carry out a war, and if the lords around her attacked, she would lose either way.

And to such a girl, a number of lords had proposed for joint control. While they were under the name of joint control, their contents weren’t as savory.

She would have to bear the children of multiple houses. Such was the value of a magician’s blood. She had sent them back, but even so, they were made thinking of the possibility her powers may backfire on the country.

That’s exactly why war was so important to her. As long as war raged on, she could live at peace. An opponent only she was able to fight… because【Elza Rusworth】was there, Gracia was left alive.

If she didn’t exist, by this point, she really would have to birth children under joint control, perhaps facing assassination once she was done with.

“… Even so, I cannot run away. So even if it’s you alone.”

“Gracia.”

The worried pair of brother and sister spoke their minds in the room. From the outside, everything looked together, but the inside was in tatters.

And to be blunt, Galleria’s present situation was closing in on itself…

# 6 - Rusworth

The Rusworth Kingdom.

It was crowned by the name of monarchy, but as with Lorphys, the king was absent. If there was was to be a difference, it had no proxy, nor was the seat left vacant. The queen was given full rule.

Up to now, there had been a king, but in this generation alone, a queen had been enthroned.

We returned from Galleria to Lorphys, and from there, we were held up by the process to enter Rusworth.

But after paying the initial passage toll, there weren't any divided territories beyond, so there wasn't a tax.

They just took a large sum when you entered and left.

Jumping down from Porter's roof, I borrowed a spot at the village we'd stopped by, and camped the night.

The roads were mostly standardized and uniform, and I couldn't feel the individual colors of lords as I had in Galleria. In the first place, Rusworth only had a king, and the imperial peerage of its nobility, it seems.

There were governors dispatched across the lands, and that must be why it felt so uniform.

But the atmosphere of the village we arrived at was questionable.

The first village was passed through was terrible. They had been living terribly poor lifestyles.

But as we closed in on the countries center, it looked as if the villages and towns were gaining energy in accordance.

The village we stayed the night at was one with a dubious air.

The merchants gave many thanks to the governor who permitted our

stay, before he returned to his mansion in good spirits.

Around the governor, the villagers gathered.

“Oh governor, can’t you do anything about it? Many of our youths were wounded in the last war. We’re not in a state we can dispatch the requested ten.”

When the chief-looking man said that, the governor looked uninterested.

“And what of it? Rules are rules. If you’re unable, then you’ll have to pay the exemption fee.”

The land he managed was, at the end of the day, a temporary charge.

Ignoring the complaints of the people, he returned to his estate.

Parking the large-scale Porter at its designated point, Clara came over to me.

“Lyle-san, please move Porter as well.”

“Eh? Yeah, got it.”

“What happened?”

She was tilting her head, so I spoke of the exchange of the governor and chief. Upon hearing it, Clara…

“Rusworth is a country managed by its royalty. Spin it positively, and it’s monolithic, but perhaps their rule isn’t attentive enough.”

Dispatching governors to various regions and having the royalty manage it all was the way of the land. Because of that, you could say they had unification.

But seeing that unification firsthand, it looked problematic.

From the Jewel, the Seventh.

『… That governor is none too enthusiastic about his job. If that’s the norm, there are sure to be problems.』

The Fourth looked at Rusworth's state of affairs.

『More than that, is it just my imagination, or is it getting more plentiful as we close in on the center? The air is quite dicey.』

With different ways of rule, the problems that came out would be different. But it was an atmosphere different from Bahnseim.

"Different countries have different circumstance, I guess. No, I knew that, but…"

Clara agreed with my opinion. She held up her staff, and as the surroundings had grown dark, she used magic to light them up.

"Well, understanding from reading it in a book, and experiencing it are different. It seems the entire area's been standardized, so we should be able to move smoother than in Galleria, though."

It's true that if you wanted to move around, Rusworth had exceptionally better conditions.

Looking around, I found the villagers of dubious air looking at Porter with wonder.

There, the Third offered me a proposal.

『Lyle, try gathering information here. Why not let Eva unravel her songs a bit? It seems that governor is still quite close, after all.』

I also thought it was a good idea, so I called Eva over.

## ❼

"… High minister?"

Night. Within the tent, I verified the information Eva had brought in.

Novem and Aria were also inside, listening to her words. But Aria looked quite sleepy.

Eva recited the info she drew out of the villagers with pride.

"Right! The position of high minister came to be over ten years ago,

by the sound of things. Up to then, the king was the one handing down all the political decisions, though."

Hearing that, the Fifth spoke from the Jewel.

『No, isn't that normal? Even if there's a minister, in the end, the decisions come from above them… was he granted a level of authority then?』

Novem listened to Eva's story.

"The information we got in Beim before was mainly about the two maidens of war. We didn't look into their personal relations too much."

I found it a little regrettable.

"If I knew there were convoys guard requests earlier, I would have left it to Rauno-san. But right now, he's looking into what's beyond Fortress Redant."

Perhaps not wanting the conversation to derail, Aria requested a continuation from Eva. She was sitting in a chair, trying hard to keep from nodding off.

"More importantly, what's this about that high minister?"

Watching a sleepy Aria, Eva let out a sigh.

"And I'm saying the current high minister is holding up the political side, while Rusworth's queen is the pillar of the military face. In Galleria, that Gracia-san's doing it all, but in Rusworth, it's being held up by two."

High minister.

That sort of title must have quite a reason behind it. But the Fourth displayed a conflicted response.

『… High minister, huh?』

Milleia-san questioned his question.

『Something about it strike you as off?』

The Fourth didn't give a clear response, but he seemed to think the situation of both countries was far from favorable.

『That Gracia girl was the same, but the one who she fights, Eliza, was it? Rusworth's queen may be reliable on the battlefield. But looking at the country's internal affairs, I can't seem to calm down.』

Their military might was still uncertain, but it does seem something was bothering the Fourth.

(But I do think both political and military affairs are only complete when held together.)

I couldn't help but be suspicious there was something going on in Rusworth as well.

## ❼

After that, we managed to travel to Rusworth's center relatively smoothly.

The fact a fortress city was at its heart was the same as Galleria, but speaking to scale, while I couldn't say Rusworth's was twice as large, it was considerably big.

But I had realized the problem point Rusworth carried. No, perhaps it's best to say I was made to realize it.

On the way to the capital, the wealth had entered my eyes.

And the closer you got to the central citadel city, the more abundant the villages and towns grew.

Meaning…

"You're in time. With this, we'll be able to make it in time for the next war."

The middle-aged man with long, white, drill-rolled hair said that as he watched us arrive. The man was【Redl Haldoir】… Rusworth's high minister. This minister… the truth is, the closer you got to the city, the higher his reputation was.

This pointed to the fact that rule was centered around the minister himself.

Next to the man, a woman looked over the luggage loaded off of the large-scale Porter.

The second maiden of war.

【Elza Rusworth】. She watched the work go on from close by. No, I get the feeling she was inspecting it.

She wasn't silent, but she had quite a quiet impression. The somewhat cold feeling I got from here must have been because of her mannerisms.

"Oy, you over there."

The one she called out to was Novem. Novem came over to her, and was about to introduce herselve, but Elza-san deemed it unnecessary.

She lightly lifted up her light blue hair, the sharp look in her violet eyes giving a cool-headed sense. Despite her eyes being the same violet as Gracia-sans, the feel they gave off was different. And of course, Novem's eyes were different as well.

"What could it be?"

"… You went to Galleria first, right? How was it, that witch's state?"

Elza-san wore the clothes of a knight on her body, and once again, that point was the same as Gracia-san. But why did she give off a different impression from Gracia-san's militaristic aura, I wonder?

Novem gave a troubled smile.

"We were merely guards, so we did not hold a conversation."

Hearing that, Elza-san scoffed.

"I see. I wanted to hear of how she trembled as war approached. But no matter."

Her silver staff was almost a mace. Holding it in one hand, and leaning it on her shoulder, she looked at the cargo, and spoke.

“The package from Beim made it in time. With this, we can fight without reserve. Next time, I’ll surely stop her breath.”

Her laugh and smile all gave off a needlessly cold something.

The minister lowered his head.

“Leave the government to me. Until you return, I, Redl, shall properly manage it all.”

I didn’t miss that fact that her response to the high minister’s words were just a moment late.

(What is it?)

“… I expect great things from you, high minister. It’s a goddessend that you’re here. Now then, I’ll return to the castle, and prepare myself. I leave handling the merchants to you.”

“Yes!”

With the minister’s reply, Elza-san took her comrades along, and disappeared into the castle.

Once her figure had disappeared, the minister’s atmosphere inflated a little.

“Quit dawdling. We’re in a hurry here!”

The merchant representative, hearing that, hastened the ones carrying out their work. And the nobles gathered at the minister’s feet.

“High minister, with this, we’ll somehow make it for the war.”

“Yes, my thoughts exactly. Even so, showing a good face to both we and Galleria, Beim truly is untrustworthy.”

Yes, I agree with you word for word on that point, but that’s just how merchants are.

(And Beim's merchants are merchants of death.)

For better or worse, Beim was a gathering of those sorts of merchants.

In the Jewel, it seems the Third noticed something.

『… Ye~ah, is he the one?』

The fourth sounded convinced.

『Quite right. A minister led astray.』

He said.

## ❼

… Inside Rusworth's castle.

After taking a shower, Elza lay on the bed in her single room.

"Hah, as I thoutht, Gracia-chan wouldn't send a letter through the merchants. I was hoping just a little, though…"

Breathing out a sigh, she extended a hand to the crate in the room. In it was the present she had received before, along with a letter.

It contained a countermeasure for dry skin.

"I really want to thank her, but when I order these sorts of things, the high minister gets loud. Something about tax money being the blood of the people or something… look at a damn mirror already."

While Elza was called the queen, she knew better than anyone that she was a convenient piece for the high minister.

From the start, within the royal line, she was known as nothing but strong. Even her family took their distance, and she spent most of her childhood in the remote reaches she'd been entrusted to.

The trouble in the capital was something she learned of only once everything was over. And of the royal line, they needed a king who'd serve as their puppet.

That was Elza.

“I must apologize by letter. And wait, it would be nice if I had something to give her… rather, I’d like some cuter clothes to wear.”

Almost all her garments were practical knight clothes for official dutites. She couldn’t wear the clothes of a king, and dresses were unfit for the position, so it came to knight clothing.

It was the high minister’s tastes, so he was satisfied, but Elza wasn’t the same.

She was suddenly brought to the capital, and made a queen. What’s more, if she didn’t do as the minister said, her life would be in danger.

The one who murdered the royalty who didn’t follow along was clearly the minister, after all.

She couldn’t quite sympathize with her blood relatives she’d never met, but she knew of the high minister’s unwholesome methods. She had even noticed how easy it would be to kill her.

“Hah, a war again… we’ve already done the arrangements, but honestly, I’m not on board.”

On top of the bed, she kicked her shapely bare feet up and down, holding her pillow. Despite her tall stature, it was cute enough.

After kicking for a while, she sighed, and stood.

… Guess I’ll prepare.“

She reluctantly reached a hand to the clothing prepared for her, took off what she had on, and began to change…

## ❼

That day.

I saw an unbelievable sight.

Having separated from the convoy headed from Rusworth to Lorphys, I saw that sight riding May from the sky.

“W-what’s this…”

As a pale blue flame tried to swallow up the battlefield, a giant wall of ice formed to block it. The fragments of ice rained down into the ground, causing a cloud of dust to rise.

The impact sent people flying, but that was behind the two fighting, and those were soldiers trying their best to protect themselves.

On the battlefield, two women stepped out front, and continued a one-on-one duel.

The scene of their shockwaves injuring their own soldiers continued, and after a while, both parties backed down.

As I watched the scene from the sky, I…

“Those two are definitely not normal.”

I muttered.

And Milleia-san let her voice from the Jewel.

『… That’s a Rearguard Skill. Both of them have huge areas of effect that drag everyone in.』

The Fifth offered a line.

『If we got them into a siege, it wouldn’t be that hard to win, though. Well, as a fighting force, they’re plenty.』

The Third thought over it.

『All that’s left is how to lure them in.』

I thought.

(… Eh? He plans to lure *those ones* in?)

# 7 - Rule Book

Having returned from Rusworth to Lorphys, we borrowed an empty house in a small village.

It was a small, countryside village-ish place, but with the recent switch of rule from Selva to Lorphys, it had faced just a bit of a panic.

The reason we were taking a stay in such a village, was to deal with Galleria and Rusworth.

Porter was parked next to the hut-like house, and Monica and the Valkyries were carrying out repairs.

More than that…

“What a terrible construction! If I let the chicken dickhead sleep here, he’ll catch a cold and be bedridden!”

She held an unfamiliar tool in her hands, as she stripped one wall after the next.

Valkyrie Unit One accepted the nails and boards from her, neatly lining them up.

“It’s no good. We don’t have enough boards and nails to make something anew. Can someone go to buy the materials? Oy, mass produced units, on your feet.”

Unit One with the same gold twin tails as Monica, stuck out her non-existent chest, as she issued an order to the Valkyrie units walking nearby.

But the Valkyries smiled and tilted their head. They stuck the thumbs of their right hands towards the ground. Including in a gesture as if to cut across their necks. One of them spoke.

“Wench, you do not have authority over us. Do not misunderstand that, you money eating worm of a prototype.”

With those words, they returned to their own jobs. I was curious as to why they got along so poorly, but at their base, they were automatons like Monica, produced by the ancients. We were using their cores, so perhaps that influence was coming out.

Unit One clicked her tongue.

“Che, should I show them the difference in our specs?”

Focussed on dismantling the roof, Monica was going at it with enough momentum to take the entire thing appart.

Seeing that, I.

“No, I don’t really mind sleeping out in Porter, but… we’re losing the point of having borrowed this place.”

There used to be towns on the border to mingle with Galleria and Rusworth, but due to the hazard of such locations, Lorphys had opted not to make use of them.

Almost all the feudal lords of Selva had been executed, and many had faced deportation as well. Because of that, there were problems coming out in rule.

Among the documents Adele-san had processed back at the mansion in Beim, papers detailing such circumstance had slipped in.

Looking around, I saw villagers sending frightened and annoyed looks at us.

Seeing that scenery, I…

“I wonder why it is. Lorphys lowered the tax, and I do feel they’re doing quite well here.”

The tax was much lower than it had been under Selva’s rule. Partly because it had been too high to begin with, but their livelihoods should have become much easier now. And this was an important villge on the route to Galleria and Rusworth. Road maintenance was done periodically.

The Fourth answered my question.

『That's an easy one. It's because people hate having their circumstances change. To go to the extremes, if the past feudal lord was only just a little bit bad, the people would never accept Lorphys' rule. There's no guarantee it will make them any happier. It isn't just tax. War, custom, and everything else, there will be plenty of trouble. From their point of view, Lyle, you're the perpetrator who brought unnecessary change to their lives.』

I thought they would be happy if their lives became more plentiful, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

I decided to walk through town a bit.

It was a small village, but walking across was still somewhat a distance. The sun was beginning to set, and the villagers I passed had sweat flowing down their brows as they worked. When I approached, they warily looked my way.

It's true I helped in the invasion of Selva.

Thinking there was no helping if they didn't like me, I looked around, and walked on.

There, the Third observed the village.

『It's that. They're relatively blessed by the land. Even when they were wrung out by taxes up to now, they didn't have any problems when it came to getting by. I'm not sure what the feudal lord was thinking, but perhaps he was maintaining it at this scale.』

"Maintaining? Wouldn't developing it yield more of a profit?"

Confirming there was no one around, I asked the Third.

He let out a sigh.

『Hah, you don't get it. Even within the same country, you can be invaded from around and plundered. What's more, this point is close to both Galleria and Rusworth. If they increase their scale, don't you think they'll be the first to get targeted? On top of that, a larger settlement demands just that much more work. If it were me, I'd grow it to a considerable scale, but it's possible the previous lord

purposely didn't let it develop. If it's small, its movements are light, and there are times when it's much more convenient.』

The Fifth spoke to me.

『With the road maintenance as well, when it comes down to it, the enemies will use those roads for a smooth and swift invasion. If the maintenance progresses, anxiety will come out. What's more, the ones up top are people of Lorphys, who may understand their circumstances, or may not. Of course the villagers will be anxious.』

So just making it bigger; simply developing it would have some protest come out.

As I mused over that way of thought, Shannon unsteadily ran up to me. Her running was one where it felt like walking would be faster.

Milleia-san looked at Shannon.

『For her running to be slower than your walk… how unreliable. But does that not look a little cute?』

The Seventh gave a verbal slip as always.

『She's at least cuter than aunty… right?』

From the Jewel, I heard a sound like that of a gun firing. A bang. And then silence. After a while, the Fifth.

『… Lyle, go and meet up with Shannon.』

"R-right."

I went up to Shannon, to find her out of breath. Perhaps someone had told her to hurry.

But Miranda, Aria, and Clara had returned to Beim for the time being. The completion of our request included the guard of the convoy all the way to Beim, and the large Porter had been stuffed with goods purchased in Galleria and Rusworth.

It wasn't possible for all of us to slip out.

(Did Novem tell her?)

“What’s up?”

After waiting for her to get her breath together, I asked. She looked at me, as she wiped away her sweat.

“S… shopping.”

“Hmm?”

“… S-she wants to buy the tools we’re lacking. But since you’re the only one who can use Porter, call Lyle back at once, she said.”

Hearing of insufficient tools, I tilted my head. Shannon handed over a memo. On it, foodstuffs, lumber, nails, and the relevant tools to use them were listed.

“Don’t we have enough food? I’m sure we brought along quite a bit.”

Even if May eats a lot, it’s not like we hadn’t taken that into consideration. So we had taken along masses of food.

“While you’re at it, gather some information too, or something like that.”

Or something like that? I’d really like that part to be clear. Perhaps Milleia-san felt the same, as she sighed.

『Oh, Miranda is too soft. As I thought, this won’t work out unless I train her.』

It seems the Fifth was observing her expression. And he also sighed.

『The fact you look so delighted when you say it is contrarily scary.』

『What are you talking about, father. I’m merely looking forward to playing around with my great-granddaughter. See, I’m…』

The Seventh hadn’t learned.

『You are a great grandmother, after all.』

After Milleia-san let out a laugh, I heard a gunshot once more.

Shannon looked at such a lively Jewel.

“Hey, it’s been glowing with quite some vigor for a while now…”

I put my left hand to my face.

“Don’t mind it. Let’s get back, and prepare to shop.”

## ❼

… Beim, the Guild’s East Branch.

Since Lyle wasn’t there, Miranda dropped by the Guild. She had to inform them the party wouldn’t be able to take on requests for a while as well, so she planned to report that alongside the request’s completion.

Aria, who seemed quite likely to hop on board the Guild’s sweet-talking, was sent to the mansion to explain the situation to Adele and co.

The one who confronted her in a private room was Tanya.

“It’s always divided first floor and third, but the only face I ever see on both sides is yours.”

When Miranda said that, Tanya smiled.

“That’s just how it is. We’re a little short on hands with receptionists. I’d really like it if they considered that fact a bit more when they evaluate my salary. Now then, splendid work in completing the requests. What shall you do about the next one?”

Miranda folded her legs above the chair, and put her elbow on the table.

“Ah, that won’t be happening for a while. We’re accepting a personal request in Lorphys.”

“In Lorphys? Well, I pushed him to take on that request, so it’s fine and all, but… what is the period?”

Miranda smiled.

“Depends on Lyle, I guess.”

When she said that, Tanya made a troubled expression.

“No clear request period, you say? Do you plan on doing something again? Seducing Lorphys’ princess or something?”

Miranda recalled Lyle’s actions. Even if she denied it, she thought he didn’t really have any credibility in that field.

“We won’t be laying a hand on the princess. Apparently she doesn’t fit in with the Walt House’s precepts.”

“Precepts?”

Tanya pondered it a bit, but having finished her report, Miranda stood.

“If something happens, just send a message to the mansion.”

Saying that, she left the room…

## ❼

In the past, what was once a trade point between Galleria, Rusworth, and Selva, was swept in a tempest.

“Find him yet!?”
“Damn, that bastard’s screwing around!”
“Kill him on sight!”

The folks who said such dangerous things were holding weapons in their hands. What was once a flourishing town had now lost its energy.

Its location had become dubious, And as an exchange point, its placement had become troublesome.

In such a town, men were running about with weapons in hand.

Eva, who stopped by it alongside me, watched the scene with a stiff face.

“What the hell is this. There’s no way I could sing in a situation like this. What’s more, there aren’t any of my brethren here!”

The town that’s energy had declined didn’t have any entertainers come through.

I began to doubt if I could buy the ingredients and materials on the memo, but I went to the market regardless.

To make sure Shannon didn’t get lost, Me and Eva kept an eye on her as we walked.

We walked, and spied a shop. In that shop without the best quality of merchandise, I bought the food ingredients, and denied the change to strike up a conversation with the shopkeeper.

“The town seems quite noisy.”

With a tired face, the shopkeeper began to talk, bit by bit.

“A wanted paper was delivered from Rusworth. There was an adventurer who had been using this town for a while on it, and it seems he’d been frequenting between Galleria and Lorphys. He had submitted false reports to the Guild, and there was something about him being a man of Galleria, or something. Saying it was a problem of trust, or something, the Guild’s adventurers are running around.”

It seems there was a small Guild in the town. One of the adventurers registered to it was involved with both countries.

“Could I see the wanted paper?”

“They’re posted around the place.”

I said my thanks, went outside, and searched out a form. Tearing off one of them, I used the Skills… Map, Search, Field… to look into the movements of the town’s people.

Shannon looked at me.

“Hey, what are you trying to do? Let’s go back quickly.”

I let those words slide, and identified a response moving suspiciously. It was evading the violently moving dots, and attempting

an escape from the town.

Memorizing that response, I spoke to Eva.

“I leave Shannon to you. I’ve a bit of business here.”

If I came in contact with one who frequented both countries, it’s possible I could get some sort of lead. With that in mind, I ran off, and chased the point running around.

But…

“Found him!”

An adventurer with a bow set his aim on the individual running on the roofs, and while he hurried to conceal himself, an arrow pierced into his leg. The individual falling from the roof hit the ground, but continued to flee while dragging his leg.

I managed to catch up. There, my opponent pulled his sword without a word.

From the Jewel, the Third.

『Does he have something on him he wants to hide so badly? This may be some material you can use to take advantage of both countries!』

I didn’t like it that my opinion aligned with his care-free words, but for now, if I was going to intrude on those countries, and perhaps make use of them, I needed information.

“Sorry, but you’re coming with me.”

I pulled a Katana, and sent its hilt right into his solar plexus. Hoisting up the man, I used the blind spots of the gathering adventurers to run away.

## ❼

Returning to the village we were taking a stay in, we were surrounding the captured man.

Novem had treated the wound on his leg, and he kept his mouth shut, without attempting to say a word. So we had him bite a gag. We had finished a body inspection while he was unconscious.

Inside Porter, we looked through his belongings.

Monica was inspecting his baggage, but she just looked with her eyes, without even trying to dig through the contents.

“He isn’t carrying anything particularly strange. He’s hiding some sort of letter, so could that be it?

What she pulled out from inside was a canteen. I took it from Monica, and shook it.

It was full of liquid.

“What part of this is… ah, I see.”

It was full of liquid, but probing around the bottom of it, there was a hidden space. When I took a letter from it, the gagged man began to flail around. A rope had been wrapped around and around his body, but he frantically moved his body, jumping around inside of Porter.

“Mmmmph! Mmmmmmpph~!”

Monica looked at him.

“Oh my, he’s showing quite a reaction. It seems we hit the mark. But why did you take such a person back with you? I think the risk is quite high.”

I confirmed the contents of the letter as I spoke.

“Right now, I want as much information as possible on Galleria and Rusworth. And he’s an adventurer who’s been moving around both lands. It’s possible he had some sort of info. On top of all that, he’s making a considerable profit in whatever he’s doing.”

Looking at the man, the clothes and equipment he wore were mostly ones that would cost a relatively high amount. His wallet contained a number of gold coins, and there were no signs he was troubled with finances.

But when I finished reading, the man powerlessly slumped onto the floor.

“… So that’s how it is.”

Novem looked at me.

“What seems to be the matter, Lyle-sama?”

I handed the letter for her. Monica looked a little vexed when I did.

“Kuh, if you had handed it to this Monica first, I’d have even jumped for joy!”

I ignored her. As Novem confirmed the contents of the letter, her eyes widened a little.

“… Um, those two countries were seriously going to war, weren’t they?”

I nodded. May also agreed.

“Even if you told me they weren’t serious, I would say it was a lie. You can find them from time to time, those sorts of abnormal people.”

Both me and May had seen Galleria and Rusworth’s war. The intense clash of both sides had eventually turned to a one on one, and ended in a draw.

But it seems that wasn’t the case.The Fifth sounded amazed.

『For reals… those two were conspiring for that?』

The Third also drew back.

『No way. And wait, this letter was a greater harvest than imaginable, but if it’s true, then using military might to contain them will prove a little difficult.』

The letter was something sent from the Queen of Rusworth, Elza-san, to Gracia-san.

Its contents…

“Good job with that last war. And I truly must apologize. Since we had less casualties than expected, the men are raising cries for a rematch. I think we’ll be invading within the next few months, but what time sounds good for you? And that dry skin cream you gave me before really did wonders.”

… Along with that, the expected invasion route was drawn up.

What scale they would attack in, and what actions they would take, so please make the appropriate countermeasure, she wrote.

The Seventh’s voice sounded as if he was holding his head.

『Is this supposed to be a rule book? Anyways, we’re attacking, so yeah, please do something about it is all she wrote. This is why those abnormal sorts are…』

Milleia-san also sounded troubled.

『It’s not as if you can’t win if you move Zayin and Lorphys, but in that case, you’ll exhaust both sides, losing the point. Now then, what will you do?』

I couldn’t hide my surprise at the fact the adventurer I’d apprehended had information beyond my wildest imaginations.

“What’s the meaning of this.”

As I muttered that, the recovered man had brazenly laid himself out, as if he had come to the enlightenment that things would happen regardless.

As I thought over how to make use of this information, the Fourth alone sounded amused.

『My, my, this might be my turn to shine. There are some problems that can’t just be resolved with fighting, after all. Yes, yes, I’m quite a fan of these sorts of things.』

All on board, he spoke to me.

『Lyle, bring all the Valkyries you can. And a letter of introduction from Zayin and Lorphys. From Beim… Meh, Fidel-kun will work. Just

have him write up some proof that you worked hard in that defensive war.』

And when I have those letters of invitation, just what do you expect me to do with them?

『Let's march right in on Galleria and Rusworth's governments! If it's no good from the outside, just attack them from within!』

… Isn't that an overly hopeless course of action?

---

Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): "Alright, it's finally my time to shine! As long as you can get inside, it's all our game! We even have material to abuse. From here on, it's the Walt House's turn (lolol)."

LYLE|-`).。oO(… Um, have I possibly been forgotten? )

# 8 - Max Plan

『There are a few reasons why some may conspire to war.』

Inside the Jewel.

The Fourth prepared a blackboard, and began explaining to me. Up to now, I had only ever experienced real wars, so when it came to conspiracies, or wars that had rule books, I didn't really have that deep an understanding.

So in regards to my deficiency, he was explaining, but…

『To put it simply, they want war. Or they need to have it no matter what, but they don't really want the other side's territory. Well, in various lands, you'll find various reasons, and anyway, they've kept on fighting for a while.』

"… So we have to eliminate that reason? Both sides were showing considerable motivation, though."

It didn't look like everyone was conspiring to fight among friends. In any case, the warzone on the border must be going through hard times, right?

There, the Third spoke to me.

『Well, even if the reason changes everywhere, everyone has their circumstance. But if they're fighting quite frequently, then it isn't population regulation, is it.』

The population a land could support had its limits. Space was limited. Even if you pioneered to increase the sustainable population, it would eventually reach its limit.

In that cause, you'd have no choice but to snatch up land. But taking more land also meant there was more land you had to govern.

"So what could their goal be?"

When I tilted my head, the Fifth reluctantly answered.

『That's what you have to look into. Well, roughly from what I've seen, Galleria is quite easy to invade. In that land, the feudal lords around are the head honchos, and you could also call it a clump of small countries. Even if you were to buy one off, I doubt any complaints would come out.』

I spoke anxiously.

"That's true, but… am I really capable of government service?"

In order to alleviate my anxiety, the Seventh smiled.

『Fret not, Lyle. You're still young, and you have results to show. Like hell there's a lord or country who wouldn't want you.』

In regards to him, Milleia-san from the side.

『Well, it's often the case that overly capable people are hated. It's not like you're the one who has to get the position.』

"… Eh?"

On my surprise, the Fourth nodded.

『Isn't that obvious? Getting into both country's governments is impossible. If you did that, then I would have you executed if I was in charge.』

He wrote the names Galleria and Rusworth on the board, and started writing my comrades… starting with Novem, under them.

『So who shall we station where? How about we decide it. In this case, you'll have to go on support, Lyle.』

"If my comrades take office, would that not be as if my party was serving two lords? I get the feeling that's a little irrational."

The Fifth looked as uninterested as ever.

『It's fine like that. It's not like they'll be serving them forever. It's to pull those two countries into an alliance with Zayin and Lorphys. Afterwards, you can deal with the surrounding small countries diplomatically and what not.』

The Fourth energetically explained his plan.

『First, you have to infiltrate both sides. Get some achievements in them… but this time, you shouldn't try for achievement on the battlefield.』

Seeing me seriously listening, the Fourth looked delighted.

『You'll mainly have them work on domestic affairs. First, you have to break the balance between them. In that case, the impatient parties will have no choice but to break the deadlocks. At that point, you'll have a chance to send people in.』

Listening to his explanation…

"But domestic affairs will take time. Even if we successfully infiltrate, won't we be bound in place for years, if not decades?"

On my opinion, the Fourth shook his head.

『We don't have such time. That's why we'll be using those letters of introduction this time. Using introductions from Zayin, Lorphys, and Beim, you can swiftly get results upon infiltration. Well, from what I've seen, it'll be Galleria.』

Better the domestic affairs of one side, and the other side might turn to us. I was curious as to whether that would really work out well, but we had a trump card of our own.

Milleia-san clapped her hands, and stood from her chair.

『Wonderful! The very fact they receive cooperation from a group with ties to Zayin, Lorphys, and Beim will raise a predicament. Of course they'll panic. It would look like the other side was finally coming to crush them for real!』

The Fourth was enjoying himself quite a bit.

『Exactly! If they panic, the opportunity to use them will widen. For that sake, we need information. With information at the base, let's dispatch the perfect personnel to both sides. If it's no good from the outside, then crush them from within.』

I wonder why it is… for some reason, I pitied the countries the Fourth set his target on.

It was at that moment. As if recalling something, Milleia-san suddenly spoke up.

『Oh, right. Lyle, it's been a while, so why not pay a visit to LYLE-kun? He may be feeling lonely.』

Staring reproachfully at her.

"… That guy gets lonely? And wait, I don't really want to talk with him."

『Don't be selfish. Look, let's go.』

She pulled my hand, and pulled me into my own room of memories.

## ❼

『I was looooneellly, Milleiaaaa-saaan!!』

When we entered the room, Lyle took a leap at Milleia-san.

He casually aimed at her chest, and his hands were making indecent movements. While his form was that of a child, this should still be out of the question.

『Oh my, sorry for that.』

A light thwap rang out as Milleia-san shot a chop down on his head. Falling to the ground and twitching a bit, LYLE tottered to his feet.

『… Y-you don't have to be so embarrassed. Following Novem, I award you the title of Iron Fortress.』

『Oh, how delightful. Anyways, you'll be explaining some more today.』

It was the space I had once carried out my life.

LYLE prepared chairs for me and Milleia, before sitting on the bed himself.

『So what should I talk about… last time I asked you to return my body, but you won't do that, will you?』

"Giving it to you isn't happening, more so, we're already different people, are we not. I wouldn't really like me not being myself."

Hearing my words, he muttered, 'how cruel'. But he looked a little happy.

『Well, if you think you can beat Celes as you are, then so be it.』

Those words, that confidence… I asked him.

"If it were you, could you beat Celes?"

I was a little reluctant to ask such a thing, but I couldn't go by without doing so. Milleia-san was looking at me as if she wanted to say something, but in the end, she remained silent.

LYLE spoke, completely brimming with confidence.

『I wouldn't lose. But I guess I wouldn't win either. At present, perhaps that's what my hundred percent would get you. I mean, Celes took whatever she could from me. Well, I'm the first genius ever born into the Walt House, and a bonifide child prodigy, so there's no helping she be envious of me.』

As he gave quite a dubious response, I regretted the fact I had posed the question so earnestly.

Milleia-san was giggling to herself.

I let out a sigh.

"On the contrary, could you return my memories?"

LYLE gave a fearless smile.

『Oh, I wonder. Rather, if you won't return the body, I'd like to think we're irrelevant.』

When I tried to rise from my chair, LYLE closed the distance between us in an instant, touching my forehead with the tip of his index finger.

『If you want to fight me, I'd advise you stopped. I mean, even if I was stolen away, I still remember how to move my body. You wouldn't be able to beat me.』

Even if he wasn't at Celes level, I didn't get the feeling I could beat the existence before my eyes. When my expression turned regretful, LYLE wandered over to Milleia-san…

『Milleia-san… hold me.』

『That was terrible. Try again with a purer heart.』

『I'm merely honest with my desires, and my heart is pure as snow. So please hold me! I want to use those breasts as a pillow!』

Thinking this guy was the worst, I moved on to the next question.

"What do I have to do for you to return my sealed memories?"

Lyle turned to me.

『… Memories, is it? Well, if you want them back, then how about a match?』

"Match?"

『You and me fighting would be impossible. It wouldn't even be a match. So… invite those lovers of yours into the Jewel. All of them. And therein lies the match. The contents are a secret. But if you don't, I'll definitely never hand over your memories, and if the chance presents itself, I'll be taking your body.』

I thought.

"Why do I have to introduce everyone to a pervy brat like you… bastard!"

When I noticed, LYLE transported himself atop the bed, and made a pose.

『As if there was any doubt! It's because I want to grope the hell out of their breasts and bums! Now, for the sake of your memories, present your lovers to me!』

I instantly.

“There’s no way I’m ever bringing them here, idiot!”

❼

The rebuild detached house had become considerably large.

To its side, a stable for Porter was made, and it looked like a large-scale reproduction of a dog house. It made me a little fearful of Monica’s love to Porter.

At that place I had set as my base, the large-scale Porter had arrived, loaded with Valkyries.

From it, Rauno-san disembarked as well, with a tired expression.

“You’re too rough with your grunts. What’s the meaning of a job request the moment I get back? What’s more, the difficulty level is way too high.”

An unshaven stubble, and an unkempt head. He was quite justified in his complaints.

“We’re in a bit of a hurry. So how was the land beyond Fortress Redant… Bahnseim?”

On my question, he breathed out a sigh.

“What was once our neighboring country has officially come under Bahnseimian rule. The one occupying it is a General from Centralle, going by the name of【Blois Cadel】. And he’s not with Centralle’s elites, but some soldiers scraped together from the provinces… it seems he’s safely governing.”

A general of Centralle was sent from the capital to some remote region. Thinking about it normally, that was…

『Was he demoted? Still, if he’s established stable rule, we can’t be negligent with him.』

The Seventh was wary.

I wondered if we had to mind him to such an extent, but Rauno-san said something questionable.

“I don’t know if he’s capable. If he was sent off to the border, maybe that’s it for him, but I don’t want to think a man who rose to general could be incompetent. I feel sorry for those below him.”

He put in a bit of his personal sentiment, making me think something happened in his past.

“They won’t be moving for now, will they?”

“They won’t, I say. Casualties from monsters has risen, and he’s dealing with that as he governs the land. I thought they would rely on Beim, but it feels more like they’re keeping some distance from it. I wanted to look into it a bit more, but my requester just happened to have a sudden change in objective.”

He spat sarcasm, but at present, this field was the priority.

The countries of Galleria and Rusworth; I had to get them on our side no matter what.

“I’ll apologize for pushing you. I want to finish things up here quickly.”

Rauno-san looked over me.

“No, I treasure customers who’re good at paying their dues. I’ll even throw in a freebie.”

“What is it?”

“A portion of Beim- the portion you’ve cause to lose profit, to be precise- has started to move. The Trēs House is waiting and watching, and it’s possible they’ll have their own movements in the near future. You’re the big brother of that soon-to-be princess rampaging around Bahnseim, right? Beim’s higher ups may cut you off for that.”

Hearing that, I kept quiet.

The reason for that was…

〖Oh, things are going quite nicely then. It all depends on how Beim

moves from here on, though. If Fidel-kun's just watching and waiting, then riling him up did have an effect, perhaps?』

『We've already gotten the money and equipment together, so I've only the utmost gratitude to him for going so far for us!』

『Well, it's normal they cut us off. Now how much can we wring out from them before they do… anyways, they aren't following the worst route for us, so it's within our expectations.』

『The merchants of death and Guild need to go through some pain once or twice. Of course, they'd better hope that Beim survives.』

『Ah, since we're at it, why not prepare a new city? For the sake of the future, let's destroy the current Beim. We have to chip down their territory, and place restrictions on the city's function.』

… Because the inside of the Jewel was enjoying itself. These guys took action knowing full well we'd be driven out. How terrible.

From the start, we… no, to the ancestors, the worst route Beim could take would be to, 'put everything they have to supporting me'.

If they did such a thing, it would be exceedingly problematic. Getting a precise recognition of the threat of Celes, and supporting me with all they had was the worst possible situation.

If they did provide such support, even if I won, I wouldn't be able to speak out strongly against the city. If I did, I'd need to resolve myself for strong opposition.

So to the ancestors, this outcome was according to expectations.

The Third spoke.

『Now then, let's put the matter with Beim on hold for a while, and focus on Galleria and Rusworth for now. If we get both countries on our side, numerically, we'll be able to move a few more tens of thousands of troops. It isn't enough to fight Bahnseim, but it's important for you to have usable forces.』

If it came to fighting Bahnseim, I doubted whether they'd really offer assistance, but I'm sure these people would think up a way to drag

them in.

Musing over how reliable they were, I didn't want to remain spoiled by them.

"What's wrong?"

Rauno-san looked on my silence with worry.

I gave a bitter smile.

"I'm fine. Well, even if they drive me out, it'll work out one way or another."

There, he scratched his head.

"… Oh, I'm sure it will."

He replied.

---

Third Generation Head (´∀`): "The pattern we wanted least was…"

Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): "For Beim to give its full support!"

Fifth Generation Head ( ゜д゜): "If they did…"

Seventh Generation Head (▪д▪): "It really would be troubling. It gave the possibility of Lyle becoming a puppet."

Milleia ヽ(*´∀`)ノ: "So we shed tears as we riled up the surroundings (lol). There really was no helping it, I say (lol)."

LYLE|∀▪)。oO(Don't be fooled, they're all enjoying this just about as much as I enjoy sexually harassing Milleia-san.)

Lyle (; ▪`ω▪´): "You're all the worst!"

# 9 - Threat

The Grand Duchy of Galleria.

Before the acting duke proxy, Gracia-san, I formed a smile.

My insides were frozen over, but let that show, and negotiations wouldn't be happening.

The Grand Duke's mansion.

In its office, I faced Gracia-san alone. She was two years my senior, but the fact her atmosphere and presence were so different must have been because she was shouldering a country.

(But she feels different from Lorphys' princess, and Aura-san the holy Maiden.)

Sitting in a pomp chair, looking over the papers lined on the table, a wrinkle came to her brow. They were the letters of introduction fom Zayin, Lorphys, and Beim.

Zayin and Lorphys easily wrote them up. Fidel-san, perhaps thinking I was going off to find work in Galleria, hummed a tune as he drafted it. From the way he said, 'Thinking of how this will let me go without seeing your face, it looks like I'll finally be able to sleep soundly at night,' I grew worried over whether I had riled the man up too much.

I never said I was the one getting the position, and it seems he had gone and misunderstood something. Since it was interesting, the ancestors advised me to purposely keep silent on the matter henceforth, so we weren't the most wholesome ourselves.

With her silver hair gathered behind, Gracia-san let out a sigh, glaring at me as she leaned her back against the chair's.

"So what do you want? Money? Women? For an adventurer of your level, if you wish for status, then it shouldn't have to be Galleria."

The final letter on the table was the one from Elza-san, the queen of

Rusworth. Stolen from the messenger adventurer, to use it as material, I had brought it up in negotiation.

It's true that Galleria was a gathering of feudal lords.

If you wanted governmental service, you'd get a better reception in Rusworth. But in that case, it would take time to rise up the ranks. Without Galleria's versatility, our plan wouldn't proceed smoothly.

"I wish for governmental service. And I will personally take on the delivery of the letters. That adventurer was formerly a vassal of Galleria's Grand Duke House, right… he was chased around town, and his wanted poster has been circulating. He won't be able to work in these parts."

She looked at me detestably, but it didn't look as if she was thinking to kill me. Of all else, I had comrades. Even if I alone were to be killed, she likely determined my comrades' movements would be dangerous.

"… 'Tis a scheme of the enemy. Good grief, Rusworth's witch sure turns to dirty means."

She tried playing it off as an enemy scheme, but I made a smile.

"Is that so? Then you're fine with going to war without any letters henceforth? While gazing at both exhausted countries, you don't think Zayin and Lorphys may try and attack?"

Gracia-san's eyes narrowed, and all at once, the room was filled with blood lust. It was suffocating. It felt as if the room's temperature had suddenly jumped a few degrees.

She spoke, annoyed.

"Holy Knight of Zayin, for that name, you're quite dirty yourself… state your wish."

I didn't let my smile fall apart.

"All of Galleria. Of course, even if I say everything, I don't want Galleria itself. Just as with Zayin and Lorphys, I'll have you form an alliance, and join a union."

Hearing those words, Gracia-san seemed to be satisfied with something.

“So you’re the reason those countries suddenly closed in? You’ve done something unnecessary… if you lot hadn’t done such a thing, we would’ve only had to go to war with Rusworth alone.”

“You’re not considering the fact we might take Rusworth in as well, are you.”

Gracia-san scoffed.

“A former provincial noble. What’s more, I heard you were of the famed Walt House, but aren’t you overestimating yourself a bit too much? … Expanding one’s territory is important, but all things are accompanied by trouble. Territory division. Territory alteration, and the other various tasks… play it poorly, and you won’t be able to stop the civil wars. Rather than dealing with such trouble, wouldn’t it be safer to maintain your status quo?”

Recently, we’ve been making progress with gathering information at Galleria’s heart. And we came to notice the problem the country carried.

It was that its system of rule didn’t match up with the present situation.

A few decades ago. Or perhaps centuries ago, it may have worked out.

Because within its surroundings, Galleria’s Grand Duke was strong, and the others were far weaker. For that sake, in exchange for their assistance, the Grand Duke House could support them.

For the feudal lords whose territories had become battlefields, it had become custom for the Grand Duke to lend money unsecured, free of interest.

But in the past few decades, the surrounding lords gained power. In exchange, the Grand Duke House had lost a large portion of its own. It was natural. The money they were putting to internal affairs was stolen by other lords and war.

“I can’t call it safe. From my point of view, it looks as if you’re only exhausting yourselves. You’re stressing too much on war.”

“… I know that without you telling me. But even if it looks that way from the outside, there’s a different point of view from within. If you know our present state, that makes matters quick. Stop trying to lure Galleria to your side. It may be off, coming from the Grand Duke Proxy, but Galleria is a country united only by the existence of an enemy. Once that enemy disappears, it will start biting at you.”

So as not to let that happen, we were taking some troublesome means.

If we absorbed both countries, establishing rule again would take time. In the worst case, we’d have to devote all our effort to internal enemies. If the knights of the overthrown countries started running reckless across the new lands we’d obtained, it would be a nightmare.

The enemy would be more knowledgeable on the terrain, and it’s likely the natives would take their side.

“Well, I’ve a few countermeasure thought up for that area. And it’s not as if winning a war is my objective.”

“What means you?”

“The ones to take office will be【Miranda Circry】,【Shannon Circry】,【Clara Bulmer】, and【Monica】. Those four.”

“… And you won’t?”

“I won’t. I mean, I have a job as the letter delivery guy. Ah, I’ll still help out, mind you. I’ll be on Lorphys territory, so if something happens, just send a notice over there. Though if you use Monica, you’ll be able to get in contact with me in no time.”

“Just what are you trying to do?”

I smiled.

“I’ll have the Galleria Grand Duke House regain the power it once held. And if everything goes well, could you build up a port? Having

the sea so close, and not using it is a waste, I'm sure."

Gracia-san looked as if she wanted to hold a hand to her head.

"The rights to the sea among lords is a complicated matter. And there are even some places where the feudal lords themselves commit acts of piracy."

"Then let's persuade them. Well, it's fine if we can't do it immediately, so that can be for a later date."

Gracia-san looked at me, making a reluctant expression.

"I've yet to say I'll hire them."

"If you don't, there'll be quite a bit of trouble, you know? And it's not as if I'm seeking profit for no one but myself. If all goes well, you may be able to make up to Rusworth without war."

Hearing that, she looked down with a conflicted expression. After a while, she raised her head with a face as if she had given up.

"… For Elza and I, we are foes we cannot bring ourselves to hate. For us both, we are in positions where if we didn't have an opponent, it wouldn't be strange we be killed. I've taken a liking to how you won't say one side must be crushed. I'll approve of the government service. But if you are to show any traitorous actions, your comrades' lives are forfeit."

That was my intent. My comrades to come under her service would become both her vassals, and her hostages.

With that, even if Gracia-san didn't trust me, if she had hostages in her hands, she would be able to have some peace of mind.

Not that I'm betraying anyone, though.

"I'll send the four at once. Miranda can easily handle anything. Monica is the same, but she's omnipotent in housework, so I ask you please treat her as a maid. Clara's level of knowledge is amazing. Shannon is… Miranda's helper."

Hearing my explanation, Gracia-san started to look anxious.

“Oy, they’ll truly be of use, right?”

“I guarantee they’re competent.”

Right, those girls were competent. Even if one was a spider-like woman, and one was useless in all fields but her Demon Eyes, and one was an existence fundamentally wrong as a maid, and one was a booklover a little problematic in other fields… those girls were capable.

“… They’re capable. Those girls are capable.”

“Why did you say it twice?”

Gracia-san looked a little worried.

## ❼

Leaving Miranda’s party in Galleria, I returned to the village we were taking a stay in.

Seeing Novem do housework for the first time in a while, ‘this isn’t bad!’ I thought to myself, but I’ll keep that my secret.

In the rebuilt house, I looked at the maid-uniform wearing Valkyrie Units One, Two and Three.

“Why are you holding up buckets of water?”

Inside the room, Unit One held up her bucket as she expressionlessly explained it to me.

“We were training in housework to surpass that Monica.”

Following on, Unit Two.

“We broke the plates you purchased.”

Ending at Unit Three.

“So we are holding them as punishment.”

Hearing that, I thought it was a little much, so I turned to Novem.

“Isn’t that a little harsh.”

But while Novem was smiling, I felt a will from her as if never to forgive them. It doesn’t seem she had such intentions.

“That’s no good. If it was just breaking all the plates, that wouldn’t be a problem, but in the end, these three were tossing plates at each other. They got into a fight over who would do the work. Because of that, they even needlessly increased the amount of cleaning that had to be done.”

When I looked at the three of them, they averted their eyes.

(… So Monica’s siblings are broken as well.)

As I had returned, Novem asked about the matter with Galleria.

“So how did things go on your side?”

I nodded.

“As expected, I guess. But it seems there were more circumstance you couldn’t see unless from inside than I had thought, or how should I put it… no, looking from within Galleria, it really is serious, I’m sure.”

Looking from the outside, I wanted to tell them to get their shit together. But from the inside, perhaps there was a different viewpoint to be found. I decided to leave the decisions on that area to Miranda.

“You approached Galleria first, and next is Rusworth, right. I hope it goes well.”

On Novem’s words, I lowered my shoulders.

“If it doesn’t go well, Rusworth will have no path left but destruction. I want to avoid that by all means.”

Overthrowing a country was really a pain.

I wanted to avoid that as much as I could, preserving their war potential, while drawing them to our side. The difficulty level was too high and rigid, but it wasn’t something impossible.

I looked at Novem.

“When infiltrating Rusworth, I’ll be having you and the others working hard. I really want to do something about that straying high minister, though.”

We had gradually begun collecting info on Rusworth’s internal affairs as well. But the more I heard, the more I understood that the high minister was only respected at the center, and the area around that. That’s exactly why he was troubling. The fact that his popularity was so high at the center. Even if I was to drag him down, his popularity was troubling.

Perhaps happy I was relying on her, Novem spoke with a smile.

“Leave it to me, Lyle-sama.”

She said.

## ❼

… Three mass-produced Valkyrie units were surveying the Grand Duke’s territory in Galleria.

They wore robes sewn with the insignia of the duke’s, so no one tried to stop them.

What those three stopped at was a river that would overflow at the slightest drop of rain.

“If we revise this point, wouldn’t the national power instantly begin to recover?”

When one unit said that, another pointed her finger. She wore a visor, so her expression couldn’t be made out, but she didn’t seem too amused.

“It is on the border between the Grand Duke’s territory, and the next. It will be difficult to deal with it, with this point alone.”

The remaining unit looked around.

“People tend to gather around water, but… in that case, there should be a few feudal lords bordering it.”

At the very least, the Grand Duke House bordered two other houses along the river. With the disputed rights to it, taking measures with it was difficult, so it was a point that had been left aside for several decades.

“… I shall send the information to master. While I hate that the detestable Monica is the relay point to send information to him, thinking of the burden on our master, there is no helping it.”

An annoyed mass-produced unit used a series of lines to send information to Lyle…

## ❼

… In Galleria’s Grand Duke House’s mansion.

Reluctantly carrying out the cleaning of a room, Monica spat out a sigh.

“Those degraded defects… they’re sending flirtatious glances at my chicken dickwad. I told them time and again that video data was heavy, so they shouldn’t send it.”

She quietly complained, as she let her blond twin tails sway as she cleaned on. For her standards, it was sloppier than usual, but those around were quite satisfied at the way she worked.

She received good evaluations of how through she was.

However, from Miranda and the others who knew her circumstance, it was more than clear that the individual was lacking in motivation.

A fed up Miranda sat in the sofa, and folded over her legs as she spoke to Monica.

“Monica, you’ve been left an important job from Lyle, so properly do your work. And wait, even if they’re called the Grand Duke House, all they have going for them is having the largest territory in the

area.”

Sorting through the paperwork, she confirmed the information she looked into on the territory with Monica as she put together her future objectives.

“… If they get flood control in order, then it looks like they would be able to recover their national power relatively quickly.”

Peeking at the papers from the side, Clara put such an opinion to mouth. But if it were possible, Gracea would’ve likely done that from the start.

Miranda held a hand to her forehead.

“The territory’s in a questionable location. What’s more, everything’s a dispute of territorial rights and the like, it seems. I can see why she’d want to leave it aside. Even if they’re going to go to flood control, who’s going to put out what level of funds, and how much would the profit be. That alone could lead to decades of debates… how idiotic.”

Clara looked at Miranda.

“Then is it impossible? With this terrain, there are a number of flood control methods I’ve read of that would be applicable.”

Miranda spoke while putting her eyes through more documents.

“While they’re abiding by the Grand Duke House, if it’s for the sake of their own profit, I’m sure they’ll take up weapons to fight. Taking all of the water management on, and letting other territories maintain the profit they had before has already been rejected, it seems. A guarantee for damages upon failure, and agreements on the area, etc, etc… Uwah~ this’d kill anyone’s motivation.”

Hearing Miranda’s words, Clara also experienced the horror first-hand.

Lyle had chosen and dispatched them, but Miranda didn’t think they could make something of the situation. She addressed Monica.

“So has there been any sort of message from Lyle?”

There, Monica unpleasantly turned around.

“… Just start with whatever’s possible, it seems. For now, have Leold-kun pile up some achievements on the domestic front, or something. An order has come to prepare from two to three pioneer villages.”

After saying that much, Monica sighed, and returned to word.

“… My instincts are telling me that chicken is yearning for my cooking.”

Or so she complained, but Miranda ignored her.

“Well, I get we can only do what we can, but will setting up two to three small villages really change the present state?”

As per Lyle’s orders, Miranda began putting up a plan to cultivate new villages under Leold…

## ❼

『The world sure is cold. Especially cold to youngsters who don’t know its workings. But it’s also true that youngsters who don’t know the workings of the world have no influence in their words!』

Within the Jewel.

I listened to the Fourth’s lecture on how to overcome the present state of Galleria.

I raised a hand.

“Um, how is this connected to cultivating villages?”

The round table room.

On top of the table, a three dimensional map of Galleria was displayed. Using a long, cylindrical pointing tool, the Fourth indicated a certain area.

『At present, it’s well known that if you reform this area, you could

largely recover national power. There are a few more points you could reform, but this is the main one.』

An area that became complicated with claims from other Houses, and a spot where flood control couldn't be implemented because of them.

"It seems they've stuck a few reasons on denying flood control. If it were me, I'd set about it at once regardless, though."

When I said such a thing, the Fourth firmly slapped his rod against the table.

『Naïve! Too naïve, Lyle!』

"Eh? Is that so?"

The Fourth refuted my naïve thoughts.

『How much time and money do you think riparian work will take? Manpower is the same. If you put it in practice… I failed, teehee… won't be the end of it. If failure for a feudal lord can bring about a terrible situation, then the best option is not to lay hands on it.』

To be honest, I couldn't understand his point of view. From what I could see on the map, there were numerous flood-control options that would work. If it would somehow put the reigns on an overflowing river, then putting it to practice would definitely be better.

『More than that… are there any flood control specialist in Galleria at the moment? You can look at their internal affairs as well. Even if they can maintain the status quo, do they look like they're wishing for any further developments?』

I thought a little.

"They aren't. I looked into the retainers to an extent, but a large majority of them are specialized to warfare…"

『Right! Sitting themselves down on such an abundant plot of land, and never doing anything with it, Galleria is the worst! In my time, it was hell because we had jack squat! Our land was mostly wastelands, what's more, we had no industry or specialty products.

I’m a baron who was suddenly handed a barren landscape, a Barren Baron you know. Thinking back on it, his majesty really was a bastard.』

When he said such a thing, the Third burst into laughter.

『Too late! You’re way too late to the party, Max!』

The Fourth corrected the position of his glasses.

『All that alone was busy enough, and I didn’t have time to turn my attention to anything else. Now then, here’s the problem. To the Galleria Grand Duke House, a boy named Lyle suddenly says, ‘I’ll take care of flood control, so please assist me.’ Will little Lyle be trusted?』

“He won’t.”

It’s true I felt there were too many uncertainties. Rather, I could contrarily understand the feelings of the feudal lords who didn’t want to touch the issue.

『So you show some results. In this area, there’s a perfectly suitable piece of land. Flood control will be necessary, and if you do it, I’m sure a few more villages could be built.』

The area he pointed to was where a small river flowed, and would easily overflow. And there were many monsters there. Reclaiming it would be too much trouble, so it hadn’t been touched.

“We’ll reclaim that point?”

『Right. It needs some flood measures, and it has a considerable degree of difficulty… if this succeeds, it will become Leold-kun’s achievement. And while it’ll take a few years before it will stabilize, as long as you can get the form together, it won’t be a problem.』

Piling up merits for Leold-kun was vital, it seems.

By doing that, Leold-kun would be recognized as one suited to internal affairs. The feudal lords who didn’t want war, and wanted to better the domestic situation would gather around him, or perhaps give him instruction.

“But will it succeed?”

『You’ll make it succeed. Lyle, you… can use magic, right? What’s more, you have the Valkyrie Series or something with you.』

“Eh? But it’s the principal of magic not to use it too much in this sort of thing!”

『As long as no one’s watching, it won’t be a problem! Build the foundation to an extent, and leave the rest to them! And wait, the precept of magic is not to do everything with it, you hear! Build the foundations, have humans do the work, and you’ll have a village up in no time! … Well, the biggest problem is actually maintaining it, though.』

In the world, the thing called maintaining was considerably difficult. There were changes of situation, but something like a village could often be destroyed upon the appearance of a monster.

“If we show results, will they let us start on the real thing?”

『The probability will rise. Small as it may be, having or not having results completely changes your persuasive power. Also, how about you have the elves spread songs of your plights in internal affairs?I mean, you left Eva-chan behind for something like that, right?』

I nodded, and decided to move by his orders. And the Fourth…

『Now then, it’s getting fun around here!』

… Cried out for joy. The surrounding reactions were dubious.

The Fifth.

『Hah, it’s no good… I want to set traps around the point Rusworth’s attacking, and wipe them out all at once.』

Milleia-san spoke uninterestedly.

『It’ll resolve itself at once if Lyle pushes Gracia-chan down. That child’s definitely troubled with the lack of romantic encounters in her position.』

The Seventh even…

『… Galleria’s Grand Duke, huh… having them overthrow their surroundings would definitely be easier. And what, with their questionable territory, wouldn’t it be better to put out an obey or fight proclamation, and have them attack? Put up a reason, tack on a just cause, win enough, and the surroundings will quiet down.』

Having learned of Galleria’s troublesome domestic affairs, he wanted to say that as long as we got them to obey, it would be fine.

Guys, how about a little more solidarity?

I don’t think my thoughts on the matter were mistaken.

# 10 - Domestic Affairs

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“Now, that’s why I’m here. This is a land no one has ever laid hand on before. Even when there’s a river nearby, it isn’t being put to good use in the slightest.”

Looking over those gathered and clapping, I felt as if I was the only one getting so excited like an idiot.

The lined up faces started with Leold-kun, then Clara, before going on to include the manpower scraped together from nearby villages.

From our side, besides Clara, there was Aria, Maksim-san, and Adele-san participating as well.

Other than them, the Valkyries expressionlessly applauded me. I wonder what it is… the mass produced models seem to be the cutest of the bunch.

While there was a river running nearby, the ground sprouted grass that grew to the hips. A forest stood in close proximity, and with the Skills… Map and Search… I could confirm that it was full of monsters.

Taking out the large-scale Porter, we had also gotten together the tools we thought necessary. Within the present situation where we carried out such preparations, Leold-kun raised his hand.

“Mr. Lyle.”

“Okay, first drop the ‘Mr’. You can just call me Lyle. Anyways, just don’t add a ‘Mr.’.”

I informed him of a crucial fact. Leold-kun tilted his head a little, but he nodded, and continued on with his question.

“Um, even if you suddenly call me out and say, ‘let’s go pioneering’, the Grand Duke House is just barely scraping by financially, you know?”

Since he knew I knew of his House's internal situation, he had no restraint in exposing the financial status of the Grand Duke's House.

(Well, from my research, I know it down to its smallest copper. It's true the Grand Duke House has no money. But staying that way is troubling.)

Right. At the rate we were going, fall would have to pass by before the Grand Duke House could procure any extra funds. What's more, from war expenses, and compensation to the bereaved, a large majority of that would disappear.

I spoke with a smile.

"Don't worry. The world is full of money, if you know where to look. I borrowed a little for this operation. Ah, it was just an advance payment, mind you. I'll properly return it someday."

Once more, I asked Vera to lend me money. I can't forget Fidel-san's eyes of scorn, but Vera said, 'I guess there's no helping it,' and lent it to me.

I'm sure I'm not the right person to say it, but Vera is surely the type of woman that would get extorted by a man.

Leold-kun looked at me, and turned his eyes to Clara.

"He's quite an amazing person, isn't he? I've only ever hear the rumors."

Clara corrected the positioning of her glasses.

"… Well, if you just look at his career history on paper, he's perfect. Know the details, and you'll be a bit disappointed, but that's Lyle-san's charm."

Leold-kun sent eyes of aspiration my way. It was as if his eyes were focused on the hero of a child's fairy tale.

(What's this… my heart hurts. Since I'm trying to use Galleria to my own ends, my heart freaking hurts.)

From the Jewel, from the Third and up.

『Kuh, those innocent eyes burn!』
『D-don't look at us like that!』
『… Back then, they all had such pretty eyes too, didn't they.』
『This aching of the heart… for a look of purity to hurt to such an extent…』
『It's no good. Even I can't bring myself to tease this child.』

I cleared my throat, and went into explanations.

"Now then, Leold-kun, this time you'll be the person responsible for cultivating this land. This area has an abundancy of monsters, and whenever rain falls, its small river overflows and floods. Cultivating this land will be of the utmost difficulty."

The gathered manpower also nodded at that opinion. The second and third sons of the area, and the existences called dependents.

"But then why would you cultivate such a land?"

"I'd be thankful if you'd just normally expand the fields, though."

"People have tried to cultivate this place numerous times, and failed, or so the old lady of the village told me."

To the men who weren't really on board, I proclaimed.

"That's exactly why! If we reclaim this point, that achievement will go to Leold-kun… to the next Grand Duke. Steadily start from the small things! Let's pile up results here, before taking on an even bigger river, why don't we!"

But Leold-kun looked around.

"Um, if we're really doing it, isn't this group too small in scale?"

I also thought so. I thought there would be more free hands lying around, but fitting of a country that had continued fighting on time and again, manpower was a scarce resource.

It was also a busy time, so all we could gather were the village's burdens, ten-odd men who wouldn't be succeeding their houses.

"Well, let's just say we're working with a select few. So let's use

magic to finish it in a flash, cultivate the land, get some results, and report to your big sis.”

Leold-kun, still a little worried, nodded. And from the Jewel, I heard the Fourth’s laughing voice that seemed to have some implication behind it.

『… Lyle, you’re in quite good form. It’s time for some on-site learning.』

❼

As the third day of cultivating passed by.

“Gyaaaah, the bank collaaaaapsed!!”

Cracks travelled across the magic-made weir, and once water leaked through, the wall collapsed, and the water behind it jetted out with good momentum.

Because it had been dammed up, the pressure built even higher, and as near as I was, I was washed out.

There, Adele-san, who had been giving out orders closeby, was washed away as well. Clara-san stumbled from the impact, and floated in the river.

As she bobbed downstream, I went to retrieve her, when Maksim-san rushed over.

“Milady! Now, quickly wipe down your body!”

After handing Adele-san a towel, he protected her from the eyes or surrounding men. I recovered Clara’s body from the flow, but I didn’t have a dry towel on me.

More than that, Adele-san was shaking as she looked at me.

“That’s why I told you! Build it sturdier, I said! Otherwise, make it so it changes the flow of the river itself, I said!”

Soaked, with her clothes stuck fast to her body, she complained to

me. Spitting up water, Clara didn't remain silent herself.

As she wiped off her wet glasses.

"The one who said something about budget, and didn't want to use the proper tools was you, Adele-san. I'm sure I said to reinforce it just as was written in the book."

Acting as a dispatch from the Grand Duke of Galleria, this time around, Clara was being treated as Leold-kun's aide. Using the knowledge she's stored up, she was supposed to play a large part in our flood control.

Supposed to… but, she couldn't help but collide with Adele-san.

"And I explained that we didn't have enough to use the book's knowledge as-is, didn't I!? That's why I said to do whatever we could, and use other methods to compensate! In the first place, there's got to be a more efficient solution here!"

As their two opinions clashed, me and Maksim-san used all forms of gestures to calm them down.

Maksim-san to Adele-san.

"Milady, there's no helping what's been broken. We have to make some improvements for the next one, and keep working on."

"Wah, our expenses have been needlessly wasted again…"

I tried to sooth Clara.

"Clara, isn't there any other method? And different knowledge or so?"

"I'm sure I chose the best option. And if the right materials were used from the start, nothing would have been wasted, to say the least."

Both Adele-san and Clara grumbled off complaints at the other. Both points were important problems, so I hadn't an idea of what to say.

But from the Jewel, came a laughing voice.

It was Milleia-san.

『Splendid. How splendid, Lyle. That follow-through, and the failure that let to absolutely no progress in the situation, it's exceedingly fun to watch!』

This person had a considerably terrible personality. It's a definite that she put on an act before the Sixth. The Sixth kept talking about some kind sister, but that was definitely a lie.

(As expected of Miranda and Shannon's ancestor.)

She had it in her to be the progenitor of the two with problematic personalities, but that wasn't much different from the other ancestors.

The Third was also enjoying himself.

『I knew that one was definitely going to break from the start.』

The Seventh laughed as he agreed.

『Quite right. Lyle, you have to be careful in these sorts of preparations.』

If they knew, they could have told me, but they just stood back and watched.

As that was happening, Leold-kun ran out from the forrest.

"S-someone! Come quick! Aria-san's…!!"

I turned to see what had happened, only to find Aria emerging from the forest carrying a large bear by the head over her shoulder.

She was soaked in blood, but I was certain it was monster blood. With its tawny fur, the Brown Bear was classified as a tough monster with a rough temperament. A troublesome monster.

And having taken it out by spear, it appeared that Aria was carrying it out of the forest.

"Oh shut it. Don't make such a fuss over a blood spurt."

Perhaps Leold-kun was actually raised with excessive care, as this was the first time he had ever gone out and done something like this, it seems.

(So Gracia-san… was a brocon.)

When Aria tossed the Brown Bear onto the ground, one of the Valkyries handed her a wet towel.

Accepting it, Aria wiped off her face, nape and hands.

“And wait, there are a lot of monsters. Way too many! Maksim-san disappeared before I realized it, and the other Valkyries are busy with work.”

To cut open the forest, most of the Valkries were felling trees, lopping off their branches, carrying around logs, and extracting stumps.

Seeing Leold-kun croached on the ground, Aria let out a sigh.

“You, if you stay like that, you won’t be able to move when you stand the battlefield.”

In worry for the boy, she called out.

But looking at her, I…

“Aria, you were quite terrible at the start too, weren-”

Halfway through, receiving her sharp glare, I closed my mouth.

The Valkyries brought towels over to the rest of us as well. I handed the first towel to Clara, and looked around.

Having unskillfully been dammed, the surrounding soil was now a mess. Thinking it would have been best I did something with the grass first, I breathed out a sigh.

Looking up at the sky, the sun was beating down brilliantly, making sweat pour down my face.

(… This isn’t ending easily at all. I thought it would end at once with magic.)

And my thoughts had been quite naïve, it seems.

❼

Night.

While the third day was reaching its end, there were almost no results to show for it.

The original plan was to carry out flood control, build a weir, and alter the flow of the river.

If all went well, it wouldn't be strange if we already started building the foundations for the village.

With a stream of failures, the plan wasn't going forward at all, and even if I sought advice from the ancestors in the Jewel, they kept on dodging the question.

While I was sure there was a reason why they wouldn't give advice, I was tired.

A tent was set up to Porter's side, and sitting on a chair of crates in it, I sighed under the light of the lantern.

With crates piled up, and a board put across to form a desk, I put Adele-san's report through my eyes.

"We've lost logs for raw material… dammit, time keeps going by, and we just keep wasting money."

Moving people also required money. One of the finer points was food. And cultivation required tools. Those tools could be expended. There were times they would break.

Flushed away by the water, there were times they could be left unfound.

"It isn't going well."

When I sighed again, a voice came to the tent. It was Leold-kun.

“Um, are you awake?”

“Eh? Y-yeah.”

Inviting him in, I told him to take a seat on a crate. As he sat, he hung his head.

“I’m sorry.”

“Hmm? For what?”

As his sudden apology confused me, Leold-kun quietly went on.

“Up to now, I had always been at the mansion… I had never thought flood control and cultivation would be this hard. I had the knowledge, but that being the case, I never thought I’d be unable to do anything.”

Having thought he would be capable of much more, he seemed to be disappointed in himself. Around Noon, he had followed Aria, and entered the forest, but he regretted how he couldn’t really do anything there.

“M- Lyle… dono, I’ve heard you succeeded as an adventurer. Even when you’re only two to three years older than me. I just thought myself too pathetic.”

I’m sure if he saw my failures through the day, he wouldn’t be holding such an impression. As I thought it a good thing he hadn’t seen, Leold-kun…

“Perhaps I was just talk. I always thought if I worked on internal affairs, I would be able to do something for Galleria’s Grand duke House. I was unhappy that my sister was doing nothing but war, yet even so, I wasn’t able to do anything myself…”

Seeing his depression, I tried calling out to him.

“… Me too. To this point, I’ve just been fumbling through trial and error.”

“You have? I can’t believe it.”

With his extent of wonder, just how had Leold-kun been seeing me, anyways? Giving a bitter smile, I prepared a drink, and handed it

over to him.

“It’s was nothing but failure. I’ve troubled many people. And in the present tense, I’m still troubling people. To add to that, assisting Galleria is for my own profit, you hear.”

Leold-kun gave a wry smile.

“I heard from Gracia. Who would have thought she was exchanging letters with the witch of Rusworth. It’s true that if the fact came out, her life would be in danger. But from my point of view, it’s still a mystery. Why would you go so far?”

In a sense, I’m a blackmailer who threatened her. But at the same time, I prevented the capture of the adventurer who’d helped with her letters up to now.

While both countries were at war, if it became known the top dogs were connected behind the scene, those around wouldn’t find it too amusing.

Having protected her against that, it seems I was a mysterious existence to Leold-kun.

I scratched my face.

“Well, I’ve got a a few reasons of my own. Forming a union with Zayin and Lorphys. Making a foothold in Rusworth while I’m at it. If Galleria recovers, and receives aid from two countries on top of having a favorable relationship with Beim, Rusworth will instantly feel cornered.”

Hearing that, Leold-kun spoke.

“… If it comes to that, my sister will lose the reason for her existence. Played poorly, that’s what assassinations are made of.”

I smiled.

“In that case, I’ll just have to take her (as a comrade). In all truth, I do want her fighting strength.”

Leold-kun made a bit of a surprised expression.

“… Is that so? Aria-san was strong too. Though she’s a different type from my sister. Gracia has a battle style that yields heavy casualties and collateral damage.”

While Aria could take on individuals, and a group one by one, it seems Gracia-san was specialized in the ultimate anti-army battle-style.

That as it was, I had no objections to her as war potential. And I needed such power from here on.

“I’m not a good person myself. I have my own reasons for assisting. So you should just use me to stack up achievement for yourself. Once we succeed here… I’m sure the eyes around you will change.”

Will it succeed? Such thoughts crossed my head, but I immediately shifted my thoughts. It’s no good if it doesn’t.

Hearing that, Leold-kun nodded with a smile.

“Understood.”

# 11 - The Fourth's Era

Within the Jewel.

Worn and ragged, I clung to the Fourth in tears.

"I can't go on any longer. Is there any chance you could lend me your knowledge?"

It was almost two weeks since the start of cultivation, but the results were terrible.

Failure, and failure. Even if things were going well it would fail, and starting again from scratch over and over again was what made up the time.

In the round table room, the ancestors and Milleia-san made expressions as if to say, 'oh dear', as they looked at me.

The Fourth stood, and beckoned to me.

And he started off towards his room of memories. Looking around, the ancestors just motioned for me to go.

Milleia-san was smiling brightly, waving me goodbye.

"… He could've at least said something."

Murmuring to myself, I headed for the room, and rounding the door, I found the scenery different from before.

The Fourth's room of memories generally displayed a one-way road that extended beyond the horizon. But today, there were carts, and men, and a young Fourth Generation Head commanding them.

The young Fourth… Max issued orders to those around.

But the atmosphere wasn't very pleasant.

『What is the meaning of this!? Just what did you use a majority of the prepared resources on!?』

The ones being told off were the people of the new addition to the territory. One of its leaders came forwards as a representative to speak with Max.

『The truth is, the villages needed some resources themselves. What we're doing here isn't particularly urgent, so we lent it to them. If the need arises, we'll definitely be able to prepare more.』

In his teens.

Young, and having just become a Baron, Max was being made light of. Normally, even if he was younger, as long as he was a feudal lord, one wouldn't take on such an attitude of contempt.

Standing before my side sometime along the way, the Fourth looked at his past self, and sighed.

『Good goddess, thinking back, just what was I doing?』

"Why did it come to this? Whatever the case, that isn't an attitude to direct at a feudal lord. Arbitrarily using up resources is…"

That was a crime where you couldn't complain if you were executed on the spot. It wouldn't even be strange if whole villages were to be punished for it. But before an annoyed Max, the other party smiled.

『It's not like this project will go well anyways. If it's going to be wasted, then it's best to put it to effective use.』
『The Walt House is an upstart House after all. I can understand why they'd feel impatient.』
『Now then, we're busy, so we'll be taking back some of our manpower.』

The people acting of their own arbitrations were being glared at by the people behind Max. But there was a difference in numbers.

"… Those who were residents of Walt House land from the start, and the ones included in the newly expanded territory. It looks like a ditch had formed between them."

It was a terrible plot of land.

While there were rivers flowing over the place, the banks had

collapsed, and unable to mend them, the water started flowing down.

The villagers who dragged themselves out of the flow looked at Max in annoyance. There, one of the Walt House's knights put a hand on the hilt of the sword at his hip.

Max held him back with a hand.

『Max-sama! You plan on overlooking that attitude of theirs!? Those were materials prepared by the Walt House. They've even boldly declared their theft of it!』

I could hear similar voices of opposition from the surroundings.

The Fourth made a bitter smile as he looked upon the scene.

『How truly unreliably. Back then, I thought all territories would be the same as my own. Starting from our founder, I was the Fourth Generation Head… the Walt House was already splendidly put together. At baronet scale, we were small, but we had a city, and were relatively prosperous. But you see, when the territory suddenly expanded, none of the rule we had at the time would get through in the slightest.』

It wasn't just the representative. To get together the area's smaller-time feudal lords, Max was too young. And for better of worse, the citizens of the Walt House recognize the House as their lords.

『It was hell. It was able to get by to that point, but the territories where the Walt House had no credibility made it look easy to make light of us. I troubled my head over how to deal with them, and the paperwork that multiplied itself all at once… no, it really was hell. It's not like the people of old Walt Territory could just say, 'I stole some resources' with a smile. I was really confused over whether he was trying to make some elaborate joke there.』

I couldn't determine just what the Fourth was trying to show me. I understood it was a harsh time, but what relation did this matter have to the current predicament, I wondered.

"Um, how is this memory related to this time's cultivation matter?"

There, the Fourth smiled.

『Lyle, what do they say about me in your time?』

“The one who spent the longest term as lord in Walt House history, adept in domestic administration.”

In all actuality, the Fourth had carved the foundation for the Walt House that had risen to baron status. Unlike as Baronet, where he had a central city, and some towns and settlements around, the one who first had to hold an outlook on a vaster territory, and work on developing it was the Fourth.

The Fourth looked around awkwardly.

『Yep, now that’s embarrassing. But while I may be referred to as such, it was really a buildup of failures as you see here. Failing as I attempted work beyond my hands, I watched my credibility fade away.』

And the scene changed.

In a room of the Walt House, facing a desk, Max was processing documents. Taking a peek, it seems the town leaders had reported quite the dubious matter.

“… Is it just me, or have they raised a report of a child’s quarrel? “

When I said that, the Fourth laughed.

『Hey, those actually come quite often. The feudal lord is supposed to judge them, but this sort of thing also puts money in the vaults, so you can’t be negligent with them. However, there really are a lot. At the time, the territory suddenly swelled up, and I didn’t have enough retainers, so it was nothing but work.』

As that was happening, a middle-aged man entered the room with his head held high. From his looks, I had to assume he was the Forxuz house’s head of the time.

『Max-sama, you canst push yourself so hard. Your mother is worried for you.』

Max raised his face, and after identifying the man as the Forxuz head, he nodded.

『I understand… no, I already knew that.』

Revising his words. They took on the form of a superior conversing with a subordinate. The Fourth explained.

『Up to then, it had been romping around the neighborhood. But since we were Barons, those around us suddenly became vassal-state like existences to us. There were territorial changes going on at the time, so in the vicinity, there weren't any lords of large territory besides us. The land we were to manage kept growing, and we had to look out for our parts. Truly a trial, that was. 』

The Fourth was definitely laughing, but I couldn't see it as a situation anyone could laugh at. From this situation, the Fourth built up the Walt House… the fact he formed the House's foundations for baronhood was starting to look like a miracle.

The Fourth looked at the Forxuz House's head, with a little sorrow.

『… The reliable neighborhood uncle suddenly became my subordinate, so I had no idea how to interact with him. What's more, he was really, really cooperative. So I can't help but think of returning the favor whenever I hear the Forxuz name brought up.』

The scene changed.

It was a small village. But it was quite devastated. The fields were a mess. The buildings collapsing, some places on fire.

Max gathered up hands, and assisted the recovery effort.

Once that ended, and Max was leaving, the villagers looked exceedingly thankful.

The Fourth spoke.

『It's a steady buildup from the small things. If you can't even get cooperation, why would you think something big would succeed… I saved a village assaulted by monsters. To me, it was just a small job. However, next, those villagers were the first to take the initiative

in supporting me. And maybe I got some to think I wasn't such a bad feudal lord after all? They gradually got more cooperative. It was at that moment. I learned the importance of piling up small successes.』

What he wanted to show me, and what he had said before.

The Fourth turned to me, and spoke as such.

『Lyle, there's knowledge, and there's technique. Both of those are in a position to cooperate with you. Who do you think is responsible for this continuous stream of failures then?』

I looked down.

"I am."

『It's mostly your responsibility. I once taught you to leave to others what can be left to them, but this time, how about I teach you to properly manage your own charge? That balance is an exceedingly difficult thing.』

The Fourth changed the surrounding scenery. There, what was shown was the spectacle we had worked on for the past two weeks.

When I thought over if such a thing was possible for a room of memories, I looked at myself, and began to feel embarrassed.

Clara drew close to that me.

『Lyle, this point will need this much materials. I do think money is important, but the fundamentals are vital.』

And next, Adele-san closed in.

『Do you seriously think we have that sort of money!? When we still have future plans, continue with nothing but failures, and our budget won't hold out. You have to cut down on what you can, or you won't be able to work in the first place.』

Hearing both opinions, I had been unable to decide, and returned a half-hearted answer.

My nervous figure, seeing it from a third person perspective, I felt

my own fecklessness.

The Fourth looked at me, and laughed.

『Clara-chan has a tendency to fixate too much on knowledge. But in this case, you should've adopted her proposal. Adele-chan is… you know, she's strong in paperwork and money calculations, but she can't help but be negligent when on site. Managing money is important, but because she didn't know enough about the worksite itself, it dragged her feet, perhaps? Well, if you're asking what I'm trying to say… at the starting block, you made a mistake in your personnel selection.』

When he pointed out that not in work, I had mistaken my personnel selection, I opened my mouth in silence. Because he didn't tell me I had failed somewhere on the job, but had failed somewhere beforehand, I found it unexpected, and was unable to react.

The Fourth spoke complaints about my selections.

『It would even have been better to drag Eva-chan along. There's a forest nearby, and you could put her to good use in that field. Other than that, Novem-chan and Miranda-chan perhaps? If you had one or the other on you, they'd casually be able to get this group together, I think.』

"… I'll change it tomorrow."

『If you make an alteration at this point, Adele-chan is going to have a lot to think about. That child will definitely come to believe you chose Clara-chan over her, after all. Rather, Clara-chan's that, isn't she… she's surprisingly skillful at interacting with her surroundings, but when it's something related to her hobby, you can't pull her at all. Anything else, and she's just fine, though.』

In that case, it would come down to pushing work forward with my failed personnel selection. As I dropped my shoulders, the Fourth awarded me a special plan.

『Now then, it's time for my advice to such a failure. Of course, I won't say a word about the work itself. Failing is an important experience. So anyways. This is an extremely important thing,

but…』

The Fourth's advice. It was…

❼

"Clara, get all the necessary resources down on paper. After that, I'll leave it to Adele-san to secure those resources. If we don't succeed here, we won't be able to press onwards, and I'll listen to the monetary sum and so on afterwards. Maksim-san… make sure not to leave your station. Aria, go with Leold-kun… No, Leold-sama, and deal with the forest's monsters. When you do that, don't move ahead, and properly follow through."

First thing in the morning, I gathered everyone, and confirmed the details of the day's work.

Looking around, everyone seemed to have something they wanted to say, but as I'd decided on a clear plan, they didn't speak out to it.

It seems that since there wasn't any room left for failure, Adele-san didn't object. Of all else, it was quite clear that absolutely no progress at all was worse as a result.

But Aria…

"Hey you know, Lyle… wouldn't it be easier to make me and Maksim-san the main force, and rotate around some to follow? That will definitely let us finish up faster."

I smiled.

"Who ever told you to annihilate all the monsters in the forest? Just take them on to an extent where they won't get in the way of other work. When we're trying to let Leold-sama pile up experience, what does having him follow you accomplish?"

Follow. When Aria said follow, she meant baggage carrying, and stripping off monster materials.

But does the heir to the Grand Duke House need such technical

ability?

Thinking over it, while it's true it's something he should experience a few times, having him stuck on that duty would be troubling.

(This country's character is its muscle-brained thought process, so saying he took care of monsters as he succeeded in internal administration will definitely afford him a higher evaluation.)

From the start, this cultivation had an objective of making achievements for Leold-kun. I thought there wouldn't be a problem as long as his reforms succeeded, but I hadn't been considering the local colors at all.

(Start in one place. Have that succeed, and in the next domestic issue, have him take command again.)

Aria looked a little awkward, so I was going to follow through for her later.

Looking around, I confirmed there weren't any question.

"Now then, today we'll be cleaning up the broken materials. They'll be in the way for the next piece of work, so remove all of them at once."

The Fourth's advice. It was something quite simple.

Up to now, I had only been ordering my comrades with larger objectives. But the personnel with bad affinities each worked based on their own thoughts, pulling each other down. An overly terrible situation.

I should have given more detailed instruction.

And even if I spoke of larger objectives, I didn't take how such roles would be understood by individuals into consideration.

I mean, when I told Aria to make sure monsters didn't get in the way of work, she even seemed to take it as an order to leave no survivors. It made me draw back. If I had to say what made me draw back, it was how the current Aria actually had the ability to actualize such a plan.

I wrung out my voice a bit.

“You got that? First make this job succeed. Otherwise there won’t be a next.”

Start at point a.

Have it succeed, or at least not turn up a tremendous failure. If we do well, we can use that success as a reason to gain greater assistance from the surroundings.

… The Fourth’s advice.

It was『greet everyone in the morning』… in other words, a『morning assembly』.

Up to now, Novem, Miranda or Monica had been with me, so a unification of will had naturally been formed.

We had been in small enough numbers that things worked out. But even if our numbers increased, the Valkyries had a line with me. They executed my orders, so these such morning meetings had been in form alone. No, in the first place, I didn’t attach enough importance to them.

(The fundamentals really are important.)

Another day passed by where I reaffirmed that fact.

# 12 - Stray High Minister

… In Rusworth's castle, starting with Elza, the important members had been called for a meeting.

That being the case, Elza was a decoration. Her authority in the conference was akin to nothing.

The agenda this time pertained to the biological brother of Galleria's Grand Duke Proxy Gracia, and countermeasures in regards to the movements of other neighboring lands.

Rusworth's high minister【Redl Haldoir】's side-rolled hair was in a bit of a mess. All of those he had gathered belonged to his faction.

He thought of Elza as nothing but a decoration, but even so, she was the strongest magician in the country, and those who pledged loyalty to her as the strongest warrior didn't exist in small numbers. She had tremendous popularity among the lower and middle class government officials.

It was but a slight amount, however, some high officials heeded her words as well. But Redl heeded them not. The reason being, Elza was the royal blood he'd brought out, and an extra ornament to the throne. And on the battlefield, she was the greatest trumpcard. But that's all she was.

As he brought Elza, who had been living a poor lifestyle to the royal palace, he seriously believed she thought him her savior.

And using the girl's military might as the backdrop, he was able to enlarge his faction this far. The only one to ever do what they liked to Rusworth to such an extent in a single generation was Redl.

His policies were drastically focused on the center, and in Rusworth's capital, his popularity was high. As the Queen's loyal retainer, he received tremendous support from the people.

But even Redl had his worries.

“Galleria’s witch… the problem isn’t that her brother succeeded in cultivation. A drop of proficiency won’t affect the present situation. But the fact an adventurer with ties to Zayin and Lorphys assisted it is a terrible predicament!”

Reading the report, it listed Galleria’s affairs in detail.

One of the members gathered held no sense of crisis as he opened his mouth.

“Getting so high and mighty after defeating something of Selva’s level, there’s nothing good to find in a second-rate country like Lorphys. They’re no enemy of us. The fact Galleria is relying on both countries just goes to prove how cornered it is.”

Redl glared at the man, and had him shut his mouth.

(To enlarge the faction, I even took in incompetents, but for them to drag my feet… just sit there with your mouth shut.)

Elsa sat in the chair, and listened to the talks, but she didn’t speak out. She spoke to open, and again at the close.

Other than that, she could open her mouth solely when Redl sought her words.

Redle continued reading down the report.

“… There’s also of how Beim is backing them. The possibility that Zayin, Lorphys and Beim may become our enemy is high. From what I heard, the one who achieved victory over the legions of monsters from the Labyrinth rampage, the Holy Knight of Zayin has taken up service in their government, has he not.”

On his statement, one of the vassals looking through the reports spoke up.

“No, it seems the Holy Knnight’s comrades took up service, and the individual himself has taken up a stay in a Lorphan village near the border. And there hasn’t been a word of him making a clear alliance with Galleria. Could there be something going on behind is all?”

A vein popped up on Redl’s forehead.

(Of fricking course there is! There's no way a detestable adventurer would side with Galleria if there wasn't any profit in it. What's his goal? Is it because we refused that four-country union proposal? Bring Galleria in, he plans to take Rusworth down?)

Lost in thought, Redl knew he needed more information. He decided to order the lords of Galleria he had connections to to collect more information.

"Dammit, you've sure gone and done an unnecessary thing, adventurer!"

He began moving towards countermeasures for Lyle…

## ❼

Beim.

Having dropped by the Trēs House's mansion, I heard from Fidel-san that Vera was out at sea on a job.

In regards to me, he spoke with a truly delighted expression.

"How unfortunate, whelp. Vera's seas away. So there's no one here to answer a beggar's pleas for money."

He said. He seemed considerably irritated, but as I had done enough to deserve it, it didn't really irritate me.

I also smiled.

"How unfortunate. And here I had come to borrow money again."

"When you've no intentions of returning it, you can't call it borrowing. If you weren't such a famed adventurer, I wouldn't even have to deal with you. Look, I'm quite busy, so could you go back soon?"

We smiled at one another as we brought up some horrid subjects, but even if Vera wasn't there, I had to state my business.

For today, I had come to negotiate with Fidel-san.

I took a sip of tea.

“… I did a bit of work in Galleria. Got a little close to the Grand Duke Proxy’s little brother.”

Fidel-san’s face turned serious.

“I’ve heard. Scheming something again? It seems you lack awareness of how much misfortune you bring to your surroundings.”

It was painful how I had nothing to refute that one. But this time’s talk was a profitable one for the Trēs House. It’s not like we’d just be extorting from them forever… or so I’d like to believe.

“Well, right now, I’m working with Leold Galleria… said Grand Duke Proxy’s brother. In domestic affairs. It’s all because of the Trēs House’s aid.”

Fidel-san looked annoyed. It seems he couldn’t forgive how I got Vera to offer funding.

“Don’t be so angry. It’s not like I’m assisting Galleria for my sake alone. The truth is, within Galleria, Leold-sama’s evaluation is rising, you see. I can’t call it perfect, but we cultivated a land previously called impossible. It’s a land that can be sufficiently taxed in two to three years’ time.”

Fidel-san scoffed.

“Getting back what you put into that investment will take several years, no… some decades, perhaps? It’s not something you wouldn’t be able to calculate, I’m sure.”

I nodded.

On top of that, I sought more support.

“Well, it’s true that all we did is cultivate a portion of the Grand Duke’s territory. You can’t call it a large result by any means. So I’d like to ask for additional backing.”

“Go home!”

He told me to leave with quite a look on his face, but if I was in his

place, I'd want to kick myself out as well. I sat on the sofa with a smile.

"… There's a good plot of land in Galleria. The best possible location if they wanted to build a port. Large-scale ships could easily pass through."

Fidel's eyebrows twitched. Taking a sip of tea, he said, 'go on', and permitted negotiations to go on.

"Once a port is completed, naturally enough, a tax will be necessary to use it. But what if you were of the merchant house that supported the Grand Duke from the start While zero won't pass, don't you think you'd be able to use it cheaply?"

His expression didn't change.

"How much do you think it costs to build a port? What's more, it's a place where the area's feudal lords personally commit piracy. Do you think I'm unaware of the points suited for a port? And it's a country that goes to war with Rusworth several times each year. Even use of the port free of charge, and a monopolization contract wouldn't be enough."

Up to now, they had been using land routes, and the cargo they could transport was limited.

What's more, the toll to pass through Galleria was way too high.

If they had a port, those such expenses wouldn't be taken. And a larger load of products could be sold.

From the envelope I had on me, I took out some papers, and showed them to Fidel-san.

"The truth is, my comrades have taken up government service in Galleria. I had them look into this and that. It does seem there are plenty of their feudal lords on good terms with Rusworth."

Written were the names Miranda and Monica had looked into, the feudal lords who likely had connections with Rusworth.

Most of them were distanced from the border, and the names of

lords with points suited to ports were also listed. Plundering in war, many of them were in regions where their own lands wouldn't meet any damages.

Looking at the papers, Fidel stroked his orderly moustache with a finger.

"… If twenty to thirty percent are in cohorts with the enemy, then Galleria must be frailer that I've heard. On the contrary, this lessens my incentive to back them. Do you plan to work up a civil war in Galleria this time?"

I shook my head to the side.

"I wouldn't think it. I've no intent of taking on all of it. But I'll have a portion disappear. Don't you think a port would be best under Grand Duke management? And if we can form a sea route, then we wouldn't mind if it be monopolized by the Trēs House."

If a port was completed, to the merchants, it meant their trading partners would increase. Their customer base would grow. It was a large profit.

"And that isn't enough. You should properly listen to what people have to say."

I laughed, while feeling worn out in my heart.

"Then listen to my story too. It's not like it's only Galleria. Wouldn't you want a port in Rusworth as well?"

Fidel-san made a serious expression, and stayed quiet. That likely meant for me to keep talking.

"Rusworth's policy focuses on the center of its lands. Without laying a hand on its coast. Well, I'm sure they'd be too insecure if power went to the border. Both Galleria and Rusworth are countries of considerable scale. Even without feuding with local merchants, I do think you'll make more than enough."

It seems Fidel-san was getting on board. He smiled, and gave his demands.

“You’re serious about monopolization of the port, right? It won’t work out if the tariff is too high either. If the conditions are favorable enough, I won’t mind considering it.”

I nodded with a smile. Cheers were raised from the Jewel as well.

“Local fishermen, and non-mercantile use will have to be permitted, though. The Grand Duke House will have to take care of pirate extermination and all. Ah, merchants recognized by your House will also be able to use it.”

Meaning as merchants, the Trēs House had the monopoly, but its use by other merchants could be permitted if the Trēs House gave permission.

Fidel-san’s expression turned to an inexplicably nice smile.

“Could you get permission from Galleria and Rusworth’s representatives? Deliver a document we’ll prepare on our side, and if you can get them to sign it, I’ll sponsor you. If it’s Galleria alone, I’ll support it as well.”

In the Jewel, the Third jumped for joy.

『It’s quite a delectable offer for Fidel-kun! Exclusive rights to a port, and he can manage permissions for its use on his own, after all! With that, he can sell the rights to other merchants of Beim, and it puts him on a superior standing. I was sure he’d bite on!』

And I was sure the Third was laughing with a dark expression. As the Third had his fun, I felt some pity for Fidel-san.

The Fourth also rejoiced.

『We at least have to give him the monopolization of the port. Rather, if we don’t do it, my heart is going to hurt. There’s what’s to come, after all.』

The Fifth, quietly.

『Rejoice for now. Right, just for now.』

The Seventh was enjoying himself.

『It's certainly a large profit. Monopoly… a nice ring to it. But what will the other think of that? I'm sure you think you'll be able to do something about it. And up to now, it's true that you could. But this time is different, Fidel-kun!』

Milleia-san gave a, 'my oy my, there's no helping it,' sort of feel as she spoke.

『Fidel-kun, even if you hate it, from the eyes of those around you, you're already a splendid member of the support Lyle faction. He's being a little naïve on how other merchants will think of it. Really… it's too late for him.』

Eva spread money among her brethren elves, and the trap was already laid. It was a small, and valueless rumor, but it was certain to spread to lands beyond Beim.

Behind Fidel-san's smile, he was surely thinking, 'I'll wring Galleria and Rusworth dry,' or something along those lines.

So I felt quite apologetic for him.

(I'm sorry. I'm really sorry.)

Fidel-san made a smile in regards to me.

"I hate 'you', but I trust you as a business partner. So wield about that ability of yours to your heart's content in foreign lands. I promise as much support as possible."

He had dropped the rude tone.

Watching his joy, I returned a smile. But inside, I was brimming with apologetic sentiment.

## ❼

… Galleria's Grand Duke House's mansion.

In it, Gracia beckoned her brother Leold to her office.

At present, it was the sister and brother alone, and having read

Leold's report, Gracia was in good spirits.

Not with her usual militaristic air, she was a kind sister for her cute brother.

"That's amazing, isn't it Leold? Defending against monsters and succeeding to develop that land! Your sister was really, really worried, you know."

To his sister Gracia, Leold-kun gave a dubious smile.

"No, Lyle-dono followed through quite a bit. And with the monsters, those around me secured my safety throughout. With the cultivation, we only got to seventy percent of our objective, and…"

Upon realizing that rather than the cultivation's success, he was being evaluated for protecting his cultivating comrades from monsters, Leold's smile turned bitter.

Gracia-san noticed his sentiment.

"It's true it didn't go as far as planned. But those around have praised you for finding success in such a difficult region. It's a fact that your evaluation around has begun to change. So stick out your chest some more."

When his large-breasted sister hit her right hand against her chest, they swayed in a manner quite evident, even from over her clothes.

Wondering if they had grown even larger while he was away, he began to feel pitiful for not being able to make her wear anything more feminine.

"I'm sorry, Gracia. I had always spoken as if I knew everything, but I've gotten to understand a little why no one around would recognize me. While being saved by Lyle-dono all the way through, I could only accomplish seventy percent of a goal… it's nothing but shameful."

Gracia placed a hand on his shoulder.

"It's splendid if you could do that much on the first attempt. And those around were sure you would fail. Seventy percent complete isn't a problem. Give it two years, and we'll be able to take a tax on

that land. And because of the support from Beim, there was barely any influence on the finances of the Grand Duke house. If you keep going like this, the day you receive the title of Grand Duke may not be so far off.”

Seeing his sister’s joy, Leold, once more, smiled bitterly.

## ❼

『In this world, there’s nothing scarier than the word free.』

Riding on quilin-form May’s back, we raced across Rusworth’s sky under the moonlight.

From the Jewel, I could hear the Third’s profound-sounding words, but now was the time for some important work.

What we aimed for was Rusworth’s royal castle, and my baggage contained a letter from Gracia-san.

Its contents were of Rusworth’s supposed invasion of Galleria in a month’s time… mainly reconfirming the terms of the rule book sent before.

“What’s this, all of a sudden?”

May knew of how I conversed with the ancestors in the Jewel, so even if I whispered to myself, she didn’t mind it.

Because of that, I could talk with them like this. The Third spoke a little happily.

『No, I suddenly felt the urge to say it. Thinking of how Galleria’s Grand Duke Proxy-chan sees us… that word just came up.』

The aloof Third Generation Head was the greatest schemer of the ancestors. He led the Walt House through its Baronet period, and scale-wise, he only ever ruled a territory several times smaller than the others. But having led a land that could neither be called too big or too small, he had a viewpoint different from the other feudal lords.

The Third, in regards to me.

『Now then, next is Rusworth's maiden of war… or was it witch here? You'll be approaching Elza-chan, but make sure not to get killed, okay?』

"… I know that. Please don't scare me too much. For argument's sake, I've confirmed the signal from that adventurer and Gracia-san."

When I said that, the Fourth laughed.

"What is it?"

『Oh, I was just thinking of how reliable you've grown from the start is all. Back then, you were so terrible, than even acting normally makes it feel like you've grown.』

He called me terrible, but thinking of how I was when I met the ancestors, perhaps it couldn't be helped. Back then, no matter what I did, I was unreliable.

But the Fourth sounded a little disappointed.

『Well, I wanted to see you show spirit strong enough to woo Elza-chan of Rusworth, though. And wait, in Galleria as well, it wasn't Gracia-chan, but Leold-kun who you got close to. How about we be more assertive here?』

I wanted him to cut me some slack. If possible, I wanted to get on comrade standings, and keep romance out of it.

The reason being, even now, the female camp was too large.

"It's not like I really have to seduce them…"

There, the Fourth, somewhat excited.

『Naïve! You're naïve, Lyle! After coming so far, you have to go for a complete set! There seem to be quite a few countries with female leaders around here, so if you want to think of what's to come after the war, a situation where you've wooed them all is truly favorable!』

"You, didn't you just have a single wife yourself!?"

『No, it's not like she wouldn't permit mistresses, but age-wise, it was already getting rough. Also, while my wife was best in the world, it's not like I'm going to push my ideal onto everyone else. See, it's case by case.』

At the start, he had said something about being devoted to Novem, but now, he kept trying to expand the harem.

Fourth… could it be he's actually just enjoying all of this?

"At the start, you denied the thought of a harem, didn't you?"

『You've got me there. But if you're going to be emperor, wouldn't it be better the more wives you have? Even more so if they're women who've shared pains and pleasures with you! … Well, as long as you can make everyone happy, isn't it fine? You're the type that gets lonely quite easily, after all.』

He said something I couldn't let slip by, but when I tried to refute, May opened her mouth.

"Hey, we've just about reached the castle."

Resolving to have a talk with the Fourth on a later date, for now I thought to safely deliver the letter.

# 13 - Letter

Rusworth's royal palace.

Me and May headed for the inner court, and following the words of the adventurer we'd taken over letter duty from, we set our eyes on Elza Rusworth's room.

While sensing the presences moving around, I used the Skills… Dimension and Spec… to identify the persons they belonged to.

(It's a good thing I confirmed her presence last I saw her on the battlefield.)

Verifying Elza-san's presence, I pulled up my hood, and tossed a pebble against the window.

There, the curtains spread, and the window opened. Elza-san stood there in casual clothing, and seeing me riding May, she clenched the staff she held in her right hand.

She seemed to be wary, and the response from the Skills turned from yellow to red.

I took a letter from my breast-pocket.

"A letter from Gracia-san. From here on, I will be the one carrying out the letter exchange."

There, wary as she was, Elza-san stroked her sea blue hair, as she pointed her violet eyes our way.

"I'll have you hand the letter over first. Any suspicious movements, and… I'll kill you."

That sharp glare undoubtedly contained malice, and for a brief instant, I thought I would extend a hand to the Katana at my hip by reflex.

To the queen that possessed a different cold air from Gracia-san, I tossed the letter.

The thrown letter spun horizontally, as it came her way. She pinched her fingers together to stop it, before going right into breaking its seal.

Remaining wary of us, she confirmed the writing style, and let out a sigh.

“… Understood. So we can’t use the previous adventurer anymore. But I’ve heard you were quite the famed adventurer yourself.”

As the queen sent a provocative glance, so I removed my hood.

“She wrote of me in the letter as well?”

There, Elza-san laughed.

“No. But when it comes to quilins, the one that comes to mind is the one who’s gotten a name for himself lately, the Holy Knight Lyle alone. I’ll prepare a response at once. Come in and wait.”

There was a balcony in front of the large window, and letting May land there, I took to waiting on it.

But Elza-san was…

“Come in. You’ll stand out, out there.”

Hearing that, I went inside, sent a look to May, and nodded. May jumped, making a single spin in the air before taking on human form.

Seeing such a change, Elza-san spoke.

“… So quilins could transform into human shape?”

Entering the room, I found it quite dreary. It felt as if it contained but the minimum necessities of life, and while the furniture was certainly expensive, it really was much too tasteless for a young girl’s room. The stylish small bottle of medicine atop the table stood out.

(A present from Gracia-san, was it?)

I spoke in jest.

“Is it really alright to let a man into your room?”

When I said that, she disinterestedly produced some paper from the drawer of the room's desk, and took a seat.

"It's a huge problem. If you're found out, it will be torture, then execution, whichever comes first. So watch yourself."

From the way she smiled, it felt as if she was used to these sorts of exchanges. Perhaps she had spoken like this to the previous adventurer as well.

Using a tool on the desk to make some light, she reread the letter a number of times.

"… There's something I'd like to confirm. Gracia-ch… Gracia's brother found success in cultivation, but his sponsor was you, correct?"

Her face reddening a bit as she tried to add a –chan to Gracia-san's name, she looked at me as she confirmed it.

IT does seem that Leold-kun's name was selling quite nicely in Rusworth as well. And the speed of the information relay was clear proof of conspirators in Galleria.

"That sure spread fast. That's right. I'm the one who backed him."

'I see', she said and nodded.

"I assume you used the matter with the letters to threaten her, but our countries are standing atop a dangerous balance. I ask you don't scratch at it too much. I don't want to fight you either, Holy Knight."

A faint smile floated on her face, but I was the same.

Gracia-san and Elza-san were both fighters with a large area off effect. While their individual battle prowess was surely high, the most troubling part would have to be their original magics.

If I were to fight them, if I didn't gather all the info I could, and form countermeasures, they would be dangerous foes.

"It's not like I'm trying to lead either country down an unfavorable path. More so, thinking of what's to come, it may be possible to

resolve the war problems that have been plaguing them."

On my opinion, Elza-san giggled. Unlike Gracia-san, she held onto her somewhat-cold atmosphere, and it felt as if she was looking down at me from above as she laughed.

"That one's impossible. Rusworth and Galleria are the same, and both sides desire for war. In Rusworth, if any damage comes out, it will be on the borderland. And the ones profiting are the knights of the center… the officers. Plunder and promotion… Is Galleria not much the same? If they don't go to war, it will instantly break down into internal uproar. Similarly, the reason our remote regions don' act up is because of the threat called Galleria."

So a war desired by both sides had repeated time again.

Well, to me, this situation was bad. Because I couldn't use it.

"Just crumble that unsteady balance already. In two to three years, Galleria's national power will be reinforced. If all goes well, even if it doesn't double, it'll reach a result close to that. Give it another ten years, and I don't think it'll be an easy task to fill in that gap."

Elza-san's eyebrow twitched.

The Fourth let a laughing voice from the Jewel. But that voice could only be heard by me.

『It's no good. Even if she's a decorations, you've got to properly explain that area! That in this world, it's not like the war grounds alone determine the outcome of war.』

Ignoring his delight, I smiled a little.

"Well then, shall I receive your response? Also…"

"What is it?"

I took out some perfume in a small bottle from my breast-pocket.

"It's a perfume that's gotten popular in Beim. Accept it as a sign of our acquaintance."

When I handed it over, Elza-san made a confused expression. But it

didn’t feel it was because she wasn’t used to receiving presents.

“… Even if I accept it, I can’t use it, you know?”

If she had a scent different from normal, surely the stray high minister thoroughly managing everything would hold doubt.

“Well, I doubt the minister will go as far as to inspect the contents of your room. And it isn’t anything strong. It’s merely a sign of acquaintance, so if you like it not, feel free to throw it away.”

Elsa-san folded her letter into an envelope, and handed it over. Accepting it, I accompanied May to the balcony. The Fourth spoke nostalgically.

『For that Lyle to be able to give a girl a present so naturally… looks like there’s nothing left for me to teach him.』

(No, rather than teach me, you were just finding fault in me, weren’t you? Well, whatever.)

Keeping wary of the surroundings, I mounted quilin-form May, and raced off through the sky.

## ❼

Having returned to Galleria, it was the day after I’d handed the letter to Elza-san.

Miranda had suggested I hand over perfume with the letter.

In exchange, I didn’t forget to get souvenirs for Miranda and the other girls. I hadn’t forgotten, but in the end, Miranda…

“Perfume for your new women, and candy for us? … This is going to cost you quite a bit.”

When she said that with a smile, I laugh, and fled.

May spoke.

“I prefer the candy, though. But as I thought, maybe you didn’t give

her enough?”

She said something like that. If possible, I wanted May to remain like that.

And returning to the village I’d taken a stay in Lorphys, I received a report from Novem and Eva.

For Eva, I had requested she circulate rumor in Galleria and Rusworth.

In the rebuilt house, I sat in a chair as I confronted them across a table, and asked about their results.

“I spread rumor of Leold-kun through Galleria. Rather than the internal forms, they bit onto the fact he kicked out the resident monsters. Could this be the national character? Well, in songs and readings, it’s true the cool fights sell better.”

I confirmed Rusworth’s situation.

“What about the high minister?”

“In the center, it wasn’t possible. His popularity’s too high, so even if you let ill rumor flow, no one believes it. Even if they did, it wouldn’t bring profit to themselves, I’ll bet. But the outer regions seem to have built up considerable frustration, so it went quite well. The scoundrel pulling the queen’s strings from the shadows, or so it goes… and wait, Lyle, you’re as terrible as ever. You’ve never made us be this thorough before.”

I had her spread rumors of the minister. Of course, a majority of them were true. Making the queen an ornament, and doing as he pleased with the country of Rusworth. Those sorts of rumors.

While we were at it, rumor that Galleria was strengthening its ties to Zayin and Lorphys.

“Say what you will. Never be negligent is a stable doctrine. If it goes well, they may make contact with us in the near future.”

The reason we were purposefully taking a stay at such a conspicuous point was to wait for contact from Rusworth.

There, Novem spoke.

“Lyle-sama, recently around the village, some disguised as peddlers have been looking into us. They were definitely from Rusworth, or so Rauno-san said when he dropped by a little while ago.”

It seems they were investigating us already.

“That sure was fast. That aside, Eva?”

“I’ve made no mistake. I’ve overtly spread only enough rumor of us that opinions may split, and bring them to a standstill. It’s just, perhaps your popularity is relatively high, but they bit on too well.”

To work with the differing opinions on us, she spread rumor we weren’t moving from this declining village. I thought it would be nice if they bit on, but for some reason, it seems they moved immediately.

It doesn’t seem we’d have to go promote the idea.

I touched a hand to my mouth.

“Eva, you spread of how the High Minister was connected to Galleria’s feudal lords as well, right? If we make rumors in accordance to their movements next war…”

Novem continued on from me with a serious expression.

“… Will they move as you want, Lyle-sama?”

Move. Rather than that, if a level of disorder was born, I planned to take advantage of that. Rusworth was a country harder to infiltrate than Galleria. As the whole country was put together centered around that high minister, even if adventurers like us got positions, we’d have to start from grunt work.

But as long as we could create a little chaos… or so was the plan.

From the Jewel, I could hear the Fifth’s voice.

『Do everything you’re capable of. That’s all. Now then, how will they move from here on…』

Galleria’s movements came a few days later.

# ❼

A few days later, a messenger from Rusworth came to the Lorphan village we were staying at.

As if concealing themselves, the ones who stopped by the borrowed house were one mid-level government official, and some lower level ones, eight members in total if you counted the guards.

They left a letter at the house beforehand saying they'd come, and when night fell, three representatives and one guard moved to enter the house.

In regards to the four with meek appearance, I confronted them in casual clothes without a weapon on me.

Naturally enough, the house rebuilt from the ground up was rigged, and from hidden spaces, armed Valkyries waited on standby.

May and Eva were outside, keeping watch on the movements of the other guards.

Me and Novem spoke with the representatives.

"… I'd heard, but you really are quite young. For you to be even younger than our queen…"

The mid-level official looked at me, and gave his impression. In all truth, I wanted to give a light response of, 'I know right? It's quite a trial,' but it wasn't the atmosphere for that, so I gave a leisurely smile as I sat in a chair.

"So what's your business?"

The three made up of low officials and guard stood without sitting. They seemed tense, as they looked at me. And the mid-level official opened his mouth,

".. It's about Galleria. Your comrades have taken governmental service in the country, and you've backed them from behind. If an adventurer with a moniker, and a national hero is to do such a thing, it makes people like us suspicious. I'd like to ask your true intentions.

Rummors have already spread within the country that you mean to make an alliance of Galleria, Zayin and Lorphys. There's even talk that you can get Beim to sponsor it."

My smile didn't collapse. The other party drank the tea Novem prepared, and got his breath in order. The latter half of his words had been somewhat excited, so he was a little tired.

In the light of the lantern on the table, I looked at the ceiling.

"Every bit of that is true. I can't just leave so many threatening countries next to Lorphys forever. I know the internal states of Rusworth and Galleria. So it wouldn't be a bad choice to side with one and crush the other, right?"

Your continued conspired wars are leaving Lorphys uneasy, so I have to do something about it. Is how I explained it.

In truth, Lorphys had never put out such a request, and neither Zayin nor Lorphys would take part in war. If I rallied for it, maybe they would, but the merit for both lands was faint. Lorphys had its hands full with managing its expanded territory. They'd fall flat if I needlessly added onto their lands again.

"… You mean to say you mind not if Rusworth is crushed?"

When one of the lower officers took a step forward, the guard held him back. He was looking around, after his eyes locked on where a Valkyrie was stationed. It seems he had noticed they were surrounded.

"Galleria was more accommodating. That's all there is to it. Or could you mean to say Rusworth will stop it's war, and take up a seat to talk? I said I know the affairs of both countries, did I not? I also know you're in a situation where you can't stop your wars."

The sitting mid-level officer hung his head. And with a sharp glint in his eyes, he glared at me. He didn't have too ill intentions. Nor did he hold any bloodlust.

"… Then I'm sure you already understand how the policies the country pushed for are inclined towards its center, right? And of how,

because of that, the outskirts are neglected, the points that become battlefields unthought of, and the profit of war all going to the central district as well?”

“Of course I do. Your high minister is considerably popular in the center. It’s quite troubling.”

My expression didn’t crumble. Holding her staff nearby, Novem expressionlessly watched our guests. If they made the slightest suspicious movements, she would take the lead of the hidden Valkyries.

“At present, high minister Redl’s faction is exercising it’s power around the center. You could say that all high officials are of his faction. There is no faction that opposes them. Among high officials, there are those of nobility, but there is nothing that can be done of the present situation.”

I listened to his story with a smile.

“You sure have it rough. But it’s all irrelevant to me.”

The mid-level official looked at me.

“… We understand that her royal highness alone is unable to fight against multiple countries at once. Is there no way you would consider moving towards Rusworth’s continued existence?”

“That’s troubling. I have things I could call plans of my own. And wouldn’t that be difficult at present, with the high minister in power?”

Saying him being there made it difficult time and again, I implied, ‘the high minister is in the way, so do something about it.’

After a while, the officer spoke with a resolved face. He straightened his back, and while those around tried to stop him, he ignored them.

“Among government officials, there are those who come from the center, and those formerly of the outskirts. A majority hail from the outskirts, but a glass ceiling has made to keep them from rising above mid-level. The minister who blatantly favors the center has no popularity among those from elsewhere. The queen is on his palm,

so she's unable to move, but… if she has the assistance of the national hero of Zayin, the possibility exists. Will you lend your power to us?"

I extended a hand to my cup, and sipped some tea. I had anticipated it when I heard a mid-level officer would be sent, and it seems I've come into contact with one holding resentment for the high minister.

I was sure they existed, but good job getting sent here. The Jewel turned lively.

The Third rejoiced.

『Is that an invite to a coup d'état? I happen to be an expert on the subject!』

The fourth seemed to be calculating this and that.

『So it'll be a gathering of mid and low-level officers… if their numbers are great, then it'll probably work out if you do a clean sweep.』

The Fifth, in his usual unmotivated tone, began warming up.

『Don't miss the timing to take the castle.』

The Seventh was cheerful. Even when he was down all through the internal administration, when fighting began, his tensions were high.

『If the high minister is suddenly taken out, there's sure to be strong opposition in the center. In that case, first drop the other important members. How about just publically connecting them to Gallerian feudal lords? It isn't a lie after all! After that, continue revealing his ill deeds, and dropping his fame before you bring him in for judgement!』

Milleia-san was also crying out for joy…

『Why not get allies in the outskirts, while you seal the high minister's movements. Get Galleria's bad lords to disappear as well.』

On Milleia-san's words, the third laughed.

『What's wrong. There's no such thing as a bad feudal lord. All that's

there is lords who've mistaken their judgements. Well, they've been drinking the good stuff up to now. There's no way they haven't considered the risk, so let's just have them honestly disappear. As expected, it's not like you can deal with all of them, so pick out the ones that'll probably be in the way!』

The Fifth, as if recalling something.

『If you have Leold lead Galleria's punitive force, revolt will come out… okay, leave it to Gracia. Let's start cleaning out both camps. 』

My head was starting to hurt. When I sighed, the mid-level officer looked a little anxious.

"Lyle-dono?"

I made a smile, and proclaimed my desire to jump onto his proposal.

"Very well. I will take those words. Because it does sound easier than destroying a whole country. But I'll have you follow my plans."

The low-rank officers were a little excited for joy. Their responses from the Skill… Search… turned blue. A color to signal allies.

(No, that's way too fast, I tell you. How about you be a bit warier?)

I spoke to everyone with a smile.

"However, the high minister will have to stay. Could you write up a list of the important members of the high officials? We'll have to start with some large chips out of his power."

The mid-level officer questioned my opinion a bit.

"If you don't take the minister down, his faction will only expand."

On top of looking down a little, I spread my mouth with to form a smile.

"I mind it not. We need only grab the center in that timespan. And the minister is loved by the center… by the people of the capital. If he's suddenly deposed, problems will come out."

He made a conflicted face.

“T-truly.”

I raised my face, and spoke in my usual smile.

“Well… let’s just have some fun with it. Now then, the detailed plans shall be left to a later date.”

Saying that, I brought it to a close.

# 14 - Grand Restructure

… Rusworth palace's grand meeting hall.

"High minister Redl, the ones found connected to Galleria's feudal lords were ones of your faction. Do you not believe you must take responsibility in some shape or form?"

Surrounded by armed soldiers, the minister Redl made a chewed-up sour expression in his head. But on the surface, he skillfully played dumb.

"Now then, I've no recollection of such a thing. It's nothing I recall ordering."

With the mid and low-level government officers at the center, they presented their evidence as they restrained a portion of the authority. They listed the charges.

Similarly surrounded by soldiers, Elza sat on the throne, keeping silent as she watched over the situation. Among the soldiers, a robed magician… a woman held up a staff as she stood, while on the opposite side, a robed spearwoman kept her ground.

Judging from the air surrounding the two, they were likely reasonably skilled.

(They've hired some with considerable skill. I can't make any thoughtless moves. Even so, for her not to rise to save me, what an ungrateful lass!)

Redl always made sure not to put his inner thoughts to mouth, but having come this far, that practice backfired on him. Elza wouldn't hand down an order to spare him.

Of course…

"But having you receive absolutely no punishment as the head of the faction won't quite go through. Voluntary house arrest. If you don't at least hole yourself in your own estate for two months…"

Hearing his opponent's demands, Redl stroked his prided beard as if to insert his fingers through it. Inside, he couldn't stop his own laughter.

(I see, so this lot understands that without me, politics will stagnate… they took a firm step to chip down my power, but they're clever enough to know any further is impossible!)

With full confidence in his municipal prowess, the light sentence put him in good spirits. Then here it would be best to take the initiative, and accept the slap on the wrist. He thought.

"I must agree. Understood. I'll put myself in voluntary house arrest. But it's not my desire for our politics to fall to pieces in the two months I'm away. The lives of the people depend on my work. Your highness, what thinks you of this?"

Saying such a thing to Elza across the meeting room, he kept perfect manner as he directed quite a rude glance at the queen.

(Good grief, a lass useless anywhere besides the battlefield.)

Elza closed her eyes for a bit, and slowly opening them…

"… The high minister is restricted to his estate for two months. What of the others?"

The mid-level officer at the heart of it deeply lowered his head.

"They are ones who used ties to the enemy to fertilize their vaults. I believe capital punishment to be fitting."

Elza stood.

"Then let it be so."

Saying that, she left the room. The authorities and high officials, surrounded by soldiers, with their fate set in stone, cried out.

"I-it's a mistake! It was the high minister's orders!"
"It wasn't just me! That guy too! He's also a traitor!"
"Don't screw with me! Why only us… and why the hell are you all staying silent!?"

That there were others tied to the lords of Galleria, they screamed as they were led away by soldiers…

❼

… Galleria's Grand Duke House's estate.

Having gathered up the lords, Gracia boldly declared.

"There are feudal lords who've betrayed the house, colluding with Rusworth. The proof is already before me, and punishment is currently being handed down to a portion of Rusworth's high officers. A two way communication, yet no measures taken on our side? In the name of Galleria's Grand Duke House, I proclaim for their suppression!"

There were lords not taking part in the meeting, and those faces were being treated as traitors.

Their original number was great, and among them, some spoke ill of the traitors with nonchalant faces. From the gathered lords…

"But to deliver punishment simply because such foul deeds were found on enemy soil…"
"I've only just dispatched my soldiers. I am rendered immobile for now."
"Would it be too late to move after looking further into the matter?"

They were negative about. The ones who thought their own collusion may come to light were especially panicked. Even the ones who hadn't turned coat had just taken part in war, making it difficult to send out troops.

There, Gracia.

"Then the Grand Duke House shall move of its own. Leaving traitors in or midst will have Galleria made light of!"

In the surrounding negativity, Galleria's greatest firepower, Gracia herself said she would move. The lords… the feudal lords had their dissatisfactions, but as she had the legal authority, they couldn't

oppose it.

And at present, as they didn't think the Grand Duke House could prepare an adequate number of soldiers at the current time, they abided by her decision.

No matter how strong she was, even if she could win alone, the processing to come afterwards, and rule of the snatched land would be difficult for her.

They'd have her blunder, and when the time came they could send soldiers, they thought they'd have her divide the land, and put out a reward…

## ❼

While violent movements were running through Rusworth and Galleria.

I was processing paperwork in the Lorphan village close to both borders. Rather than paperwork, I was reading letters from Beim, while I plucked my hair.

This problem was a request from Fidel-san.

"Steal the authority of the merchant houses supporting Rusworth's minister? And fork over an authority a level higher than the complex mess of merchants in Galleria? The bastard… keeps persisting this is equivalent exchange for his backing. Never said a word about any of this poppycock before…"

Inside the rebuilt house, Valkyrie Unit One presented some tea, so I downed it all at once.

It was nice and cool, but as I thought, the tea Novem and Monica put out was something else.

"Thank you."

When I gave my thanks, Unit One lowered her head, before pouring a refill into the cup. I held the pen in my mouth, and thought over

what to do with this problem when the Fourth offered advice.

『Lyle, your opponent… Fidel-kun doesn't actually believe all his demands will go through. It's about how much you have to accomplish to satisfy him. By the way, accomplish all that, and the anger of local merchants will come your way.』

When I'm dealing with it for him, he'd have the dissatisfaction come my way. Or perhaps, those sentiments would go to Gracia-san and Elza-san.

For Gracia-san, perhaps that way was actually best. But for Elza-san, I wanted to do a good job of processing it.

"I need to set up a plan for those around hold a level of dissatisfaction for Gracia-san, so she can pass on the Grand Duke position to Leold-kun in the near future… now then, what should we do about Elza-san."

In her case, as the High Minister had a high popularity rating in Rusworth, any offhand behavior would instantly let complaints fall onto her. Of all else, even when the outskirts hated him, with charges brought onto him in the capital, he took action with the 'country's best interest' in mind: cleaning up after the idiots of his faction. Or so they said, and even now, his popularity was high as ever.

(Fixated on the country's center, and there's no doubt that to the populace around the capital, he was a wonderful prime minister. He really is troublesome, this person.)

But ignoring Fidel-san would also become a pain. We needed his aid, and the need was coming to consider aid from other mercantile houses of Beim.

Watching my mulling form, the Fourth sounded like he was having fun.

『Mull over it all you can. And set the basis on pure and true information. Try to remove as much of your wishes and expectations as you can, and consider it over again with certain facts as the base.』

“… I will make the minister fall soon. If the House that was backing him finds another figure to back… no, I’ll have to set up a merchant of Beim while I can.”

After thinking it over, I weighed merit and demerit.

While I was pondering it like that, the information collected by the mass-produced Valkyries was sent to Monica, who was similarly connected to me with a line. She organized it, and sent it back to me.

But these Connection-based dealings… they were a plain Mana drain. There was some distance between us, but more than that, they were sending quite an amount of information to each other through me.

I wanted them to cut me some slack, but it was a necessity, so I bore with it.

The information sent from Monica informed me that a portion of Galleria’s lords were preparing for war.

Scope-wise, it would be a battle of a few hundred men. In Galleria, the Grand Duke house boasted the greatest power. Because of that, in a situation like this, they could easily grasp victory.

“… So as long as they had a ‘just cause’, they could deceive their surroundings.”

With the truth of there being traitors, the others couldn’t complain at the Grand Duke’s counter response. Or perhaps they couldn’t speak out too strongly.

I immediately dispatched Valkyries, putting them on information gathering in a new territory. But in this case, it would be quicker for me to venture to the site.

“Once I end this, I’ll head to Galleria… no, returning to Beim, and hearing Eva’s report is also… that’s wrong, a detailed meeting on Rusworth it also necessary…”

I fell over the desk.

I got a feeling the Fourth was watching over me with a grin.

## ❼

Beim.

Waiting for The Vera Trēs to arrive at port, I gave Eva and May some spending money, and told them to do as they pleased in the city.

Eva had some work to do in Beim, so she could only play a bit on the side.

When I had returned to Beim on May's back, I had first dropped by our greatest supporter Fidel-san… No, the Trēs House in high spirits.

But even if I said that, my biggest aim was Vera.

The large ship entered the port, a gangplank was fastened, the sailors descended and went into their work.

There, one of the sea men seemed to have noticed me.

"If it isn't Boss Lyle!"

He lightly raised his right hand to give greeting, before calling loudly for Vera. There, Vera popped her face over the deck, and spotted me.

"What is it… oh, Lyle!"

As she descended the ship in hot haste, I moved to meet her.

"Long time no see. I didn't get the chance to meet you last time, so I came to see you."

There, she blushed a little.

"You, didn't you say you were busy in Galleria and Rusworth? No, I'm happy, but…"

"How about we have a meal together? See, if I don't do something

once in a while, I can't sit still, or rather… yeah, I'm not sure how to put it, but let me treat you to lunch!"

On my request, Vera looked a little shocked, but she smiled, and nodded. I didn't like the situation where she was just putting out money, so this time I wanted to treat her on the money I'd made.

"You don't have to be so mindful. Well, I guess I can let you treat me."

Chatting with an embarrassed Vera, I ended up waiting until she finished up with her work. When she returned on board to retrieve her luggage, a voice came from the Jewel.

It was the Fourth. He had been calling out to me especially frequently these days.

『Lyle, do keep in mind that treating her once doesn't change the fact you're a gigolo.』

(… I-I know that.)

❼

… Within the Jewel, the ancestors watched over a scene of Lyle and Vera clumsily eating lunch together.

Milleia, as she watched them dine at a relatively high-class shop.

『How should I put it, when he has so many woman waiting on him, he's too innocent, or rather, pitiful… though it's interesting to watch.』

Lyle himself, even when eating in a high class restaurant, his etiquette was perfect. But while he was conversing with Vera, something felt awkward.

He was being too mindful of the other party.

The Third was watching such a Lyle with a grin.

『This carries a different intrigue from how used he's gotten to it. Well, Lyle himself never thought too much of a harem after all. Unlike

the all-affirmative Novem-chan, I'm sure he's got a lot to think over himself.』

Milleia muttered Novem's name.

『Novem-chan, is it… well, that kid's, for better or worse, affirmative of Lyle. Even after she's seen that pitiful form so many times, good of her not to have abandoned him yet. As I thought, it's in her Forxuz blood.』

The Walt House was, for generations of heads, supported by the Forxuz House. They had been together for enough years that they didn't think it strange, and the faces gathered here had thought in their times that it was just the way things were.

The Fifth watched Lyle as the boy hesitated when Vera's face suddenly turned red.

『That boy, he sometimes just naturally makes passes. It's scary. He's usually no good, but at the important places, he definitely never misses, and more than that… are you sure he isn't actually aiming for it?』

Seeing how Lyle had flushed Vera's face with a single line, the Seventh laughed.

『With this rhythm, I'd like him to move onto seducing the two maidens of war, no the two witches.』

Within all that, the Fourth was making a bitter, somewhat lonely smile. He looked up at the images projected onto the Jewels ceiling.

『… In truth, somewhere far away, alone with Novem-chan. Running away somewhere far beyond Celes' reach, and living a laidback life would've brought him the most happiness. It's all because he had to choose to fight Celes.』

Milleia turned her eyes to the Fourth, before swapping to, and staring at the fifth. The Fifth averted his eyes.

Milleia let out a sigh.

『Good goddess, why must you be so stubborn… Fourth, no,

grandfather.』

『Yes, my dear?』

Correcting the positioning of his glasses with a finger, the Fourth crossed his legs, and left his hands on top of them. He looked at Milleia with a smile.

『I'm a guide for Lyle's sake. I do wish for you ancestors to fulfill your roles, but right now, it's your knowledge that Lyle needs more than your Skill.』

Hearing that, the Fourth laughed. Not to mock, or because he felt strange, he simply laugh.

『You sure say some pleasant things. So my knowledge is more worthwhile than my Skill… truly, you've got a point there. Probe into it, and a Skill is but a tool. Instructing him until he can handle it properly is our role. But hearing we have a value greater than that is pleasant on the ears.』

While he said he was happy, the Fourth looked a little lonely.

『Even so, Lyle will need to stand on his own someday. That's the sort of road he's chosen, and eventually, we'll become nothing but hindrances. Staying around to teach Lyle my way of doing things is easy, but if that goes on, a Lyle-ish way of doing it will cease to be. There's no need to go as far as to destroy a new possibility to choose my means.』

The Third opened his mouth without looking the Fourth's direction. His eyes remained locked on the outside scenery of the ceiling.

『… Originally, I'm sure I was supposed to have disappeared first. It sure is tough having a potent Skill.』

Was he joking or serious. That wasn't the problem.

The Fourth gave a bitter smile as he spoke to his father, the Third.

『Third, no… dad, no matter the situation, you'll probably be able to deal with it, so I can leave Lyle to you with relief. From your dubious standings, your methods that got you on so well in the world… I do

respect your evil, villainous Skill.』

The Third, quietly.

『That didn't sound like respect at all. But there's a good time for everything.』

The Seventh silently listened to the conversation of father and son.

Perhaps the Fifth found himself unable to stand the atmosphere.

『Even when time-wise, mr. lyle is sure to come out soon? Are you sure you can't put it off to a little later?』

Hearing that, the Fourth raised a grand laugh.

『Yep, it's truly a shame. A little more, and I could see Lyle go mr. lyle again… Before that, I'll pass down my Skill, and disappear. It's that. I never thought it'd feel this lonesome at the start. That I could come to expect so much of that unreliable Lyle.』

Watching, projected on the ceiling, Lyle nervously eating his meal with Vera, the Fourth gazed on with a smile across his face…

# 15 - Full Drive

"… Are you alright, Lyle-dono?"

In a room of Galleria's Grand Duke House's estate, Leold-kun looked over me in worry as I fell prostrate over a desk.

With the appearance of a young boy, these days, he was usually somewhere nearby, watching me work.

At present, what I was doing was the paperwork pertaining to the land that had newly come under the Grand Duke's direct control. A mountainous pile of papers was brought in, and I had to take care of it.

Officially, it was Leold-kun who was processing the work, and with assisting me as a goal, he was watching me work to learn, it seems.

'It seems' or rather, Gracia-san wasn't too adept at this sort of work either. Her hands were full with her regular duties, so she had sent Leold-kun around to me.

"… I'm fine, I think."

I ate with Vera in Beim, and after having talk with her, I left Eva in Beim, and returned to Lorphys on May.

After that, Galleria subjugated some of its resident feudal lords, and hearing they were understaffed with the aftercare, I had raced over.

Yesterday, I had gone to Rusworth to deliver a letter. Since the High Minister wasn't there, the government official were in panic. On top of that, Elza-san was questionably troubled. Because the forms the minister took care of were flowing to her.

I had left Novem and Aria by her side, so I'm sure the two of them are helping out with various things.

No, Novem's fine, but I'm more worried for Aria. She wasn't useful in the slightest when it came to paperwork.

“No, your complexion is quite terrible. Wouldn’t it be better you rested?”

I looked at the heaping pile of papers looking over the desk. It felt as if a laugh was going to escape from my throat. In Lorphys as well, I had to process various documents and reports, in Rusworth, I had to give out orders, and in Galleria, I had to confront my papery arch nemesis.

This is strange. I’m sure I’m supposed to be an adventurer.

I’ve been moving a few pieces behind the scene, but why has it come to this? Shouldn’t my job involve some more physical secret maneuvers or something?

No, I get the feeling I was doing something similar in Zayin, so perhaps that’s just how it goes.

“Once this is over, maybe I’ll rest a bit. Even so, once more, this is some terrible management right here.”

Looking at one page of report, the previous lord had been collecting a tax of seventy percent. It’s fine and all to do it, but a majority of that wasn’t being used to develop his territory. Maintain the status quo, and the insufficiencies for the growing population were dealt with through war, one way or another, or so it felt.

Plunder through war was being used as a temporary source of income. In the Jewel, the Fourth raged as well.

『When their land’s so prosperous, why the hell have they only developed so far!? Isn’t it strange!? Rather, what’s the meaning of them being able to live just fine with a seventy percent tax? If that’s how it was, if they put more power into domestic affairs beforehand, they would have won against Rusworth without any war, wouldn’t they!?』

Well, they were conspiring to war with one another, so I doubt they were too fixated on victory.

“They even have Beim nearby. If they loaded up with newer technologies and funds, then people would gather as well. Why has

it come down to this?”

The one to answer my question was Leold-kun.

“… Um, even without forcing ourselves to take on the world outside, we were alright where we were. And the situation persisted where Rusworth was the only threat we shared a border with. Our other neighbor Selva was just troubling itself between Zayin and Lorphys for long years, after all.”

The only country around to become a threat was Rusworth. What’s more, as they competed with each other for national power, both sides had things to gain, I’m sure. For a small portion of people, that was.

“You didn’t want to let Beim step into your trade matters? But you’re still purchasing merchandise from the city at regular intervals.”

Leold-kun didn’t seem too knowledgeable on the peculiar situation.

“I do not know. It’s just, there were many lords who didn’t want to have to rely on Beim. It’s called the city of merchants and mercs, but there are plenty who see it as a gathering of merchants of death, and bandits who call themselves mercenaries.”

It’s true that at a glance, Beim looked as if it were prospering off of trade.

But most of the goods they dealt with were weapons. The Trēs House had contracts with blacksmiths and craftsmen to produce large quantities of weapons.

The ones who consumed them were adventurers and mercenaries, and thinking of how monsters existed across the continent, weapons would always find a way to sell.

At times, they would fan the flames of war, and make it big from strife, I’m sure. It was clear from how they dealt with Zayin and Lorphys before.

Sending mercenary brigades, they would sell consumables and armaments to both sides. A considerable sum of gold had to be

moving around.

“… I’m sure there are plenty of lords opposed to how I brought the Trēs Trading Company in.”

When I looked at the ceiling and said that, Leold-kun made a bitter smile.

“Yes. Plenty of them. But with a port in its hands, Galleria will profit greatly. It’s impossible to have gone on with our old ways forever.”

He was younger than me, but he was thinking of quite a bit.

From the Jewel, I heard the Fourth’s voice.

『AAAaaaAAAaaAH!! How does this form of rule even work!? If it were me, I’d be too scared to sleep at night!!』

Looking at the reports of Gallerian lords, I let the Fourth’s screams of anguish slide, as I continued with my work.

❼

… Miranda popped her head into the room afforded to Lyle.

Her hands carried a drink and midnight snack, and she knocked the door, and awaited a reply. But nothing came in response from within the room.

Gallerian government official Miranda reached a hand to the doorknob, and confirmed it wasn’t locked before entering.

“Alseep already? Ly…le?”

The light of the hall flooded into the dark room, and she could see the feet of Lyle, lying on the sofa.

On the other of the room’s two sofas, a boy even smaller than Lyle lay.

Miranda lit the room’s lights, and left the snacks and beverage atop the table.

Looking over the room, she saw the processed forms had become a mountain themselves. Pushing up her light green hair with her fingertips, she took a single paper of the pile, and confirmed it.

"… Lower the tax rate a bit, and use assistance on flood control as criteria to reduce it? With that, you'll be able to reduce it to the average. Well, otherwise, I doubt we'd get any cooperation, huh."

Blessed with plentiful land, the people of Galleria couldn't help but feel little panic, and even if you asked their assistance, even if you offered a slight tax reduction, they wouldn't move to help. Because even if they didn't, they could put food on the table.

Lyle had taken action with that fact in mind, but from his usual behavior, Miranda couldn't imagine it.

"It's as if he's getting some expert support…"

Abruptly, her gaze was sucked to the Jewel letting off a faint light at his breast.

For a moment, Celes crossed passed her mind. Jewel… just as the yellow Jewel contained the mind of Agrissa, the beautiful siren, could Lyle's gem also…

After thinking that far, Miranda shrugged her shoulders.

"Shall I drape a blanket over him?"

Saying that, Miranda left the room…

❼

… Inside the Jewel.

The Third was alone with the Fourth in the round table room. It was the considerations of the heads of history, and Milleia.

『Now then, it's finally come to Max's turn. I wonder how long it will be until my own role ends.』

Without calling him the Fourth, Sleigh the Third called out to his son

Max. Going by appearance, if one had to say, Max looked the older.

The Third was always flippant, and on top of that, he looked quite young. His personality wasn't very adult-like, and if asked who they thought was youngest, anyone would point out the Third.

『Dad, you have the important duty of getting the 'Best of Lyle' together while I'm away.』

On the Fourth's words, the Third raised a loud laugh.

『That sure is important! … But we've few judges among us. Don't you think we should keep a few more around?』

The Fourth removed his glasses, took out a cloth, and polished the lenses.

『I don't. Of all else, we've been blessed with nothing but plentiful harvest, so I'll place my expectations on your top picks, dad.』

Called dad, Sleigh narrowed his eyes.

『… Max, it was to embarrassing to say. But even if there's no meaning left in it, even if we're all long dead, I'll still say it. Max, you were a much more splendid Walt House Head than I. You're a son to be proud of.』

When Max put his glasses back on, he lightly touched the cloth to his eyes. And while he noticed it, Sleigh didn't comment.

『… There's a lot I want to apologize to Fredricks for. But that boy runs away whenever you try saying sorry. 'I've really troubled you, I'm sorry' I wanted to say.』

On those words, Sleigh shook his head to the side.

『It isn't just you. I was also spare heir-less, shoving all the status onto you. Father to child, and child to grandchild. We all leave much to one another. But whether they're good things or bad things is another story.』

Max stood from his chair, corrected his posture, and looked at Lyle's seat. When it let out a pale light, Lyle appeared in it.

Sleigh… the Third silently looked at the Fourth.

And the Fourth, Max, turned to Lyle.

『Lyle, today I think I'm going to pass down my final Skill.』

The Third watched him smile as he said it to Lyle. And he watched them off all the way to thuir rounding of the door of memories…

『Max, among the heads, you were the one who held the status for longest. I've troubled you quite a bit, but… you were much more splendid than I.』

… He muttered…

## ❼

It was a road that extended without end.

In the past, to see the Third who'd fallen in battle, the path the Fourth had hurriedly tread had been carved deeply into his memory.

The thought of wanting to go faster to meet the Third had manifested his Skill,【Speed】.

And from its influence, he was able to meet his father while he still drew breath. And he could carry on the gem passed down for generations.

In the blue sky were heavy white clouds.

Looking up at it, I somehow had an idea of what the Fourth across was trying to tell me. And it was precisely because I understood that I asked.

"Isn't it a little too sudden?"

The Fourth smiled.

『Is that so? I don't think so. My role… no, I believe all I can help you with ends here.』

This time, I turned my face to the ground, and covered it with both

hands. It felt like tears would come out, so I spoke in jest.

“I’m a little busy, so let’s make it when I have a little more time. See, the one who said the mood was important was you, wasn’t it?”

The Fourth let out his voice and laughed.

『No, that’s in dealing with women. But since it seems you properly remembered it, that’s fine. It’ll be necessary from here on, or rather, it’s definitely best you get it down, so make sure to practice it in combat. Ah, with Novem-chan and the others, I mean.』

Who else is there? I got my breath in order, and met his eyes head on.

“I wanted you to teach me a lot more, though.”

『I’ve taught you the basics. The rest is for you to mull over. If you don’t hit a large wall, you’ll never grow over it. Oh, and I don’t mean Growth by that, mind you.』

In regards to his words, I gave a bitter smile. And when his expression turned serious, he moved to my side in an instant.

When I looked to the side, the Fourth placed a hand on my shoulder.

『… 【Full Drive】. It’s my final stage Skill. If you manage to master it, perhaps you’ll be able to put up a bit of resistance against Celes.』

To the utmost, it was just resistance, and the Fourth didn’t say I could win. Of all else, in pretty much her base state, Celes was able to accomplish a similar feat.

When I swallowed my breath, the Fourth took some distance, and pulled daggers from the back of his hip. He started throwing them around.

Two, four, six, eight… after going that far, I saw his form grow hazy. By the time I noticed it, the daggers he’d thrown into the air were cleanly stuck into the ground around me.

The Fourth was behind me, skillfully juggling two daggers.

“That’s quite a radical way of teaching you have there.”

The Fourth gripped the two daggers in his right hand, using his left to correct the position of his glasses.

『If it's teaching my Skill, then another way would work. I'll be teaching you how to use my Skill to fight, and how to fight with my weapons. Did you think it was a style that used two daggers alone?』

I had sparred with the Fourth a number of time. But I'd never seen him use such a number of daggers.

"You never needed them to go against me, you mean?"

『No, fundamentally, when you go against multiple opponents, two daggers are ruined in no time. And by using multiple Skills…』

Swiping my right hand to the side, I produced my Sabre to repel a dagger. However, what I parried was but one, and the second one stuck into my right shoulder.

Pulling out the deeply-embedded dagger, I was shocked by its output.

"… You used the First's Skill to raise the impact. And purposely aiming the first dagger at a difficult point, you put off my timing."

Using the First's, and Second's Skill, he raised the damage, and threw the daggers with precise aim.

But taking two new daggers in hand, the Fourth.

『Too bad. I was also using the Third's Mind. It looks like the effect was light on you, but I dulled your reaction speed a little.』

When he took a stance with his daggers, I leapt forward, and thrust with the sabre. But the Fourth before my eyes disappeared, and I was carved up across my body.

Arm, leg, torso, nape, and head… blood spouted from all sorts of places.

『Mind isn't just hypnosis. It can even make hallucinations. Even if the enemy has a resistance to it, if it has even the slightest effect, then it's as you can see.』

I turned around, but the Fourth wasn't there. And I heard a voice from my back again.

『It really is just a Skill that lets you move quicker than usual.』

I turned again, and the Fourth wasn't there.

This time, the voice came diagonally to my back, so I raised my left hand, firing magic around.

"Thunder clap!"

Thunder roared, and lightning fell around. As a dust cloud rose, this time the voice came from all around.

When the dust cleared, there were a few dozen Fourth Generation Heads around.

I hurriedly corrected my stance with my sabre, but pain instantly ran up my right shoulder. Next my left thigh.

『… No matter how strong a person's resistance may be, get them a little worked up, and voila. Good grief, the Third's Skill really is unfair. Even I can't say if I'd win or not.』

Correcting my breathing, I removed the daggers in my shoulder and thigh. I tossed them in a different direction from him, but the Fourth before my eyes disappeared, and the daggers I tossed were reappeared with their points coming at me.

I hit them aside with the sabre, keeping cautious of my surroundings. To probe for presences around, I used the Second's Skill… Field. The Sixth's Field as well to search him out.

But even if I pinned down his response, he'd move in the next instant, sending daggers flying at me. At times, the daggers would draw large curves as they flew.

Countless daggers fell around me, and pierced into the ground.

Of them, I took one in hand, and threw it in the direction of the Fourth's presence. In midair, another dagger likely thrown by the Fourth spun horizontally, as it knocked the one I threw off course.

“Hah… hah…”

As long as you fought in the Jewel, injuries would instantly heal. No, perhaps there were never any injuries from the start, and you only felt the pain.

Within that situation, I was gradually getting able to follow his presence.

The frequency I repelled the daggers increased, and my injury rate decreased.

Around us, the blue sky gradually clouded, dimming the field of our fight.

“You’re plainly strong, aren’t you. Just from what’s been passed down, you left huge service in internal administration, and you barely had any medals on the battlefield, you know!”

I knocked aside a dagger, and as it spun through the air, the Fourth caught it in his hand.

『The times were as they were. There were plenty of bandits, and plenty of monsters. I went out to subjugate them a number of times. I wasn’t blessed the abundance of the plains of war, but there were still skirmishes among territories, you hear.』

The scenery of the road extending beyond the horizon had grown dark.

It was starting to rain.

But my eyes were wide open.

『… Looks like you’ve gotten the knack for it.』

I could see the rain slowly falling to the ground. And my reactions could keep up with the Fourth’s movements.

As he jumped out, and cut at me, I caught him with my sabre.

『Nice reaction. As I thought, you have talent. I manifested this stage at the end of my twenties, you know.』

As he jumped back to take distance, I retook my stance.

『… Ok, let's move onto the end.』

Taking off his glasses, and tucking them into his breast pocket, he lowered his body. While the rain was getting stronger, it looked to me as if the movements of the drops was growing slower.

And at the end, it looked as if the raindrops had stopped in the place. As the Fourth moved, I also took a large lunge forward.

# 16 - A Never-Ending Road

To me, the heads of history were my ancestors, and prodigious personnel.

There had once been a time my father told me I'd follow in their footsteps, and I had thought I would continue on the Walt House.

But as I came into contact with the heads recorded in the Jewel, I was able to see their true good points. And I saw their bad points as well.

Within the Jewel… as we both tread in, our bodies swallowed up the stagnant raindrops falling over the endless road, as we raced through them.

I hit into individual drops of my own volition, and the scene of them bursting on contact was quite a peculiar spectacle.

We continued facing one another on the straight path, and the Fourth's daggers hit against my sabre.

The wonder of the sparks leisurely floating by repeated again and again as our blades continued to meet.

In the time created by the Fourth's【Full Drive】, we violently shed sparks as, without either side backing a single step down, we swung our favorite weapons.

If I were to thrust, he'd use the dagger in his left hand to block and parry it.

When he thrust with the point in his right, I'd use the sabre blade, and guard to redirect it.

By a slight margin, the Fourth's movements were faster.

With his glasses removed, he spoke with a serious expression.

『When you aren't surpassing me, you think you can stand against Celes? Put more effort into it, Lyle!』

I replied.

“You don’t have to tell me that!”

To catch up to his faster movements… no, with momentum to surpass them, I used the Skill. I had no choice but to master the Skill the Fourth had brought forth.

I got the feeling it was accelerating me even further. And I noticed the Skill’s flaw.

Putting the considerable concentration it required aside, it ate up Mana at a rate that could be called unfair. But if I cut off the Skill use here, I had no prospects of beating the Fourth.

Of the daggers he held in both hands, he was using his left as if in place of a shield. But the one in his right hand was skillfully targeting my vitals.

Being an existence of memory, the Fourth had no risk of running out of Mana.

For me, my recovery speed was faster than in reality, and even if I suffered a fatal wound, it would instantly recover. But still, even so, I had a limit he hadn’t.

If this scramble continued, the one put at a disadvantage would be me.

(A little more… just a little!)

Using the Seconds Skill Field… along with the First’s Limit Burst.

With my entire field of perception widening, and all my body’s abilities rising, I still couldn’t reach him.

My physical abilities had exceeded his. But in ability… weapon handling, fighting style, and effective Skill use, I was falling short.

As countless sparks and drops burst and popped, I decided to take the challenge.

With a large step in, I thrust my sabre, only for the Fourth to greatly bend his body back, as he crossed the daggers in both his hands to

lock, and shatter the sabre.

Metal fragments slowly scattered about.

『You're too impatient, Lyle.』

I listened to the Fourth's words, as I bent my lips. When I smiled, the Fourth quickly tried to regain his stance.

But there was no way I could let the opportunity slide.

"No, I'm just calculating some, Fourth."

Tossing the broken sabre aside, I manifested a weapon in my hand. While it held the enclosed hilt of a sabre, its blade portion was an unsabre-like Katana.

Grasping the manifested weapon tightly, I stepped in even further.

"… Full Burst!"

The Third Stage Skill the First Generation Head had left behind… Full Burst… it was a fearsome Skill that could raise one's abilities several times over. It used stored-up Mana as fuel to produce explosive effects.

But it really used up Mana, and if you missed the right timing, it could run dry, and render you immobile.

While the Fourth's movements started to look even slower, I took a diagonal swipe at the Fourth.

Despite his hasty attempt to block, it destroyed a dagger, and drew a line from his right hip to left shoulder.

As the blade cut into the Fourth's body, blood slowly spurted out.

Unable to kill my forward momentum, I ended up passing by the Fourth, and there the Skill's effects cut off.

I hit into and gouged out the ground, letting mud fly. It covered the both of us.

Feeling a sudden sluggishness, I fell to my knees, but forcibly turning

myself, I found the Fourth covered in mud, and covered in blood, staring at the daggers in both his hands.

As the daggers faded away, he let out a laugh.

Scratching his long, blue hair, he took out his glasses from his breast pocket, and put them on.

The Fourth looked up, and before I had noticed it, the rain had let up, and white clouds covered the sky. A gentle wind blew.

For the mud covered, blood covered we, the wounds closed, and the mud disappeared, and our weapons dissipated as well.

The Fourth turned back to me, patting the wound in his body as it faded away. It was a scene you could only witness within the Jewel.

『You really did surpass me in the end there, Lyle. No, you surpassed me as a fighter. Yep, with this, I've nothing left to hand down. I'm satisfied. Really satisfied.』

Beneath the bluening sky, we stood across on the never-ending road.

There, a door of memory appeared behind me. It looked like the door to the Fourth's room.

"I'm also glad I could satisfy you. I couldn't help but worry that you'd be scolding me at the end."

When I put up a strong front, and spoke lightly, the Fourth laughed. I also tried to make a smile, but I couldn't tell if I was doing it well or not.

『… I really do still feel like watching over you. You still have some unreliable parts, and more than anything… looks like I got a little too involved. Can't help but have the feelings well up. But this far is enough. Because interfering forever isn't a good thing.』

"Not really… you could give advice a little while more."

When I spoke my mind, he shook his head to the side.

『Lyle, you're more than capable of standing on your own. It's

because I think that, that I can feel relieved. I taught what I could, and you've got Novem-chan and the others with you, so I believe they can compensate for your insufficiencies.』

Within his own room of memories. The Fourth looked over the road etched in his heart.

『… You could say life is like a path. At the start with your family, then alone, and after, with a family of your own. Finally, you see your children off, and it's the end. Right, originally, long, long ago, my road would have ended when I saw Fredricks off. Yet now I can see off another, and at this point, I can think it a blessing.』

Both me and the Fourth looked down the path. The endless stretch of road had not a visible start or finish.

"… At the end… what can you find?"

On my quiet words, the Fourth locked his arms, and thought a little. Gibing a grin, he laughed aloud, and gave his last bit of advice.

『Lyle, if you're aiming for emperor, there's something you should remember. Governing and ruling are different. And governing means you yourself are also a portion of the country. Even if you get the continent together in your hands, someday to your child, and your grandchild after that, it's a borrowed item to be passed hand to hand.』

Looking over me, the Fourth looked relieved.

『… If you do become emperor, Lyle, I'm sure there will be lives unfairly trampled over as well. Hated and cursed. Do you have the resolve to be something like that? Even if you're emperor being sovereign has little to give you in return. Even if held in your palms, that status may be an empty thing. Even if it means losing your quiet happiness, do–』

"—Even if it comes to that. I will do it."

The Fourth nodded. And he offered his true last advice.

『Now then, that was the end of all I can teach you. So shall we

review?』

As the Fourth spread both his arms, leaving the endless road where it was, golden fields expanded around. Peasants worked them with their families, and a scene of their delight at a plentiful harvest unraveled.

『What you need in battle is quantity. And quality is also important. But what you need to get all those together is everyday domestic administration. What you've accumulated daily will merely show itself as the outcome of war. Rule and diplomacy and war are all the same. War is merely a single means. But if you've no choice but to choose it, you need to assemble the conditions for victory. Lyle, assemble the terms you need to win. And make sure not to forget what comes after victory. Don't become a fallen martyr. Become the grand villain who survived it all.』

After telling me to become a villain, the Fourth waved his hand at me.

『And I guess that's about it? Anyways, regretful as it may be, it's time to part. Lyle, I expect great things of you.』

"Thank you for everything up to now. Fourth… sama."

I lowered my head. The Fourth smiled. It seemed he planned to see me off.

I open my mouth, but silently shut it, turned, and walked towards the door.

I felt like turning around countless times, but step by step, I walked towards it. The moment my hand touched the handle, the door lurched open, and I turned around.

There, I found many people waving their hands at me.

The Fourth… Max as well; to his side, a woman of small build, was gripping the Fourth's hand, and waving her other one at me. Perhaps they got along well, as she was nestling her body to his.

And around them, were the retainers I'd seen in the Fourth's

memories. The Forxuz House Head, and those that looked to be his subordinates. They all waved their hands.

When my eyes instinctively opened wide, that scene let off a blinding light, and by the time I had noticed it, I had lost consciousness.

## ❼

… Miranda brought two blankets to Lyle's room, and draped the first one over Leold.

Next, she covered Lyle, but before leaving the room, she noticed the Jewel was shining brighter than it had been the last she's looked at it.

It radiated a blue light.

And Miranda looked at Lyle's face. He was crying, so she wiped a tear with her fingertip.

"He's crying quite sorrowfully."

Miranda raised Lyle's body, sat on the sofa herself, and rested his head on her lap. Perhaps he was quite tired, as Lyle showed no signs of waking.

As she stroked his hair to sooth him, Lyle moved his body as if to embrace her knees.

"Today's special. A reward for working so hard."

Miranda gently pat him. While age-wise, Lyle was a year her junior, he was still a remarkable figure leading countries around by the nose. Being able to pamper such a person made her feel a sense of euphoria.

Having a remarkable figure depend on her made her happy. But it couldn't be helped there were many rivals around, and so the frequency she could do it was low.

"Good grief, you just keep increasing the women around you… Hah, I've got to do my best, I guess."

Miranda directed a kind smile and tone to Lyle…

## ❼

With the documents I'd compiled in hand, I dropped by Galleria's Grand Duke Proxy Gracia-san's office.

These days, she'd been off suppressing traitorous lords, and maintaining order in taken territory, moving around quite busily.

When she returned, her regular duties awaited, and she was leading days just as busy as my own.

"These are the papers you've requested."

When I handed them over with a smile, Gracia-san accepted them with an enervated expression.

"… My apologies. I do feel worry for having you act as Leold's stand-in. So how's Leold?"

Officially, the one who did the paperwork wasn't me, but Leold-kun. In truth, he did help me, and I had taught him the method to process, them and my way of doing them.

A little more, and he'd surely be able to do them normally himself.

"He looked quite tired, so I let him sleep. He'll be inspecting the site tomorrow, after all. Please put Miranda and Clara on his support staff."

Gracia-san, with a troubled expression.

"Taking both of them off here will make things quite harsh."

To the country of Galleria riddled with domestic affairs, it seems the ones able to perform on that field were valuable existences.

But I couldn't just leave them on governmental duty forever, so I wanted to make a situation where they could hand off their positions soon.

“Should you not get some vassals capable of paperwork then? That sort of work is important.”

It seems she had thought of that as well, bit it wasn’t going too smoothly. Sitting deeply into her chair, she folded her legs, and read my report as she spoke.

“If that was possible, I wouldn’t be so troubled. Hiring retainers costs money. The territory expanded, but on top of future port maintenance and flood words costing a pretty penny, my current retainers plan to take the initiative to hire more military men.”

That may be the country’s character, but having learned so much from the Fourth, I could only think it was poorly balanced.

“… Then how about you get such retainers around Leold-sama? I’m sure he’ll be heading the heart of domestic affairs for a while, after all.”

There, as if recalling it, Gracia-san.

“Also, the resistance is… right. It’s about the last letter I received from Elza. We’ve both reached the conclusion that avoiding the coming war will be difficult. The other lords who betrayed feel themselves in danger, and therefore desire merits in the next battle, it seems. Rusworth’s in much the same situation. They usually remained immobile on the back lines, eager only when it came to plunder, but this time, they’ll be eager from the start.”

The proof of betrayal, and the means to get rid of them was already in order. While I began to see the movements of each feudal lord as a comedy, I touched a hand to my chin.

“… Then can’t the Grand Duke House settle for a policy not to move much itself? Have the traitorous ones work themselves, and watch from a nice high point. Right. Should we get Leold-sama’s first campaign out of the way while we’re at it?”

The national colors. Leold-kun, who hadn’t finished his first campaign, was being made light of.

No matter what form his first battle may take, it would make future

matters much easier.

Gracia-san sounded apologetic.

“T-that’s right. Leold is at a good age to experience his first campaign. Yes, I’ll arrange it at once. I’ll tell Elza to be cautions… my apologies, I’ll write a letter at once, so could you deliver it?”

Seeing Gracia-san become serious when matters turned to Leold-kun, I smiled and nodded.

“Very well. Ill have the other side move with such a policy as well. And it’s about Leold-kun’s armaments…”

Once more, Gracia-san broke into a panic. The preparations wouldn’t make it. There wasn’t even a month to the next war.

I wanted to tell her not to make war in such a state, but as it was a conspired one, that’s probably just how it was.

“I-I’ll prepare them at… it’s no good. Even if I put in an order at this very moment, it won’t make it in time.”

It was equipment for the next Grand Duke. If they were too frugal, they’s be made light of as well.

I offered a proposal.

“I’ll try asking a merchant I’m acquainted with. He’s a famous one, even in Beim, so he’ll surely prepare a product to your expectations. He also has a skilled craftsman under his wing, so it’ll be alright.”

Gracia-san looked at me.

“I’m sorry. I’ve done nothing but rely on you. Normally, having an adventurer such as yourself do so much would raise numerous problems, but…”

Well, I exploited a weakness to infiltrate, so if you feel so sorry, it makes me contrarily feel apologetic myself.

There, Gracia-san…

“Come to think of it, your air has changed a little from how it was a

few days ago. No, I don't mean change in a bad sense…"

… Looking at me, she said my atmosphere had changed from before. I tilted my head.

"Is that so? Well… quite a bit happened, so perhaps that's why. Right, to change the topic, what do you think would make a nice present for next delivery? I'm returning to Beim, so I'll purchase something while I'm there."

Gracia-san looked a little embarrassed.

"N-no, receiving them so frequently would be troubling. I still have the perfume you gave me before."

She shook her hands saying she didn't need anything, so I decided to put in some sort of sweet.

I was planning to bring something over to Elza-san's place as well. Since Novem and Aria were there, I'd need to give them something separately as well.

"Understood. Then I'll include some sweets."

"No, what I'm saying is…"

Turning away from an embarrassed Gracia-san, I left the office.

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Third Generation Head (´･ω･): "… It's gotten lonelier again."

Third Generation Head (´･ω･`): "Will anyone new come in?"

LYLE|ω･`)ノ: "Um… I'm here, you know…"

# 17 - Uselyle

… Aria was making a fed-up face in a room of Rusworth's castle.

The reason was simple. Lyle had come to the country to deliver a letter. If that's all there was to it, that wouldn't be a problem. It wouldn't have been.

But the one who accepted the letter, the lord of Rusworth castle, Queen Elza, looked delighted as she took Lyle's present in hand.

What she received was clothing. For the garments of a queen, perhaps too light wasn't the right term, but it looked somewhat close to something a woman of Beim would wear.

Too casual for royalty. Aria had doubted Lyle's choice, but Elza looked truly pleased with it. She had tried to conceal her embarrassment, but she looked as if her hands would pass through the sleeves at any moment.

"S-sorry. For making you feel you had to prepare a present each and every time."

With a reddened face, Elza wasn't putting out her usual ice-cold air. It was as if she was a maiden in love.

But to Aria, it was considerably dubious.

Without picking up the slightest hint of these circulating sentiments, Lyle spoke to Elza with a smile.

"I heard they were in fashion while I was stopping by Beim. I got your size through Novem, so I don't think there will be a problem. Oh, don't worry, I didn't hear of your size. I just received the memo, handed it to the tailor, and received the clothing."

He was acting most gracious. That interaction attentive to the finest detail, it would be better if he just acted like that regularly, thought Aria, and perhaps there was no helping her expression look so strained.

Elza lifted up the clothing.

“W-will it suit me? I’ve always been drawn to this sort of thing, but never wore one myself…”

Lyle smiled.

“Of course it’ll suit you. But a pity as it may be, I must depart at once. Please let me hear your thoughts the next I stop by. Ah, seeing you wear it would be nice as well.”

When his mouth moved so elegantly, how can he bring himself to actually say such lines, or so cramped Aria’s face. From the point of view of someone who knew him, she even doubted whether he was a different person entirely.

With a dyed face, Elza said something like, ‘U-understood. Then the next you come by…’ or so, as she looked down.

Aria began to feel it all stupid, but even so, as Elza’s guard, watching from her side was her job. Novem was filling out paperwork in another room, and therefore, not in the vicinity.

“I-I have to write a letter! I’ll write a response with all due haste, so please wait a moment.”

Elza carefully left the clothes atop her desk, instantly grabbing a pen, and pulling some paper from a drawer.

Lyle watched over her actions with a smile.

Aria drew closer to him.

“What’s all this then, planning on seducing Elza-san next?”

On Aria’s thorny words, Lyle’s smile didn’t collapse. But Aria felt as he laughed, that he was a little troubled. And he looked a little lonely.

“You could tell? There’s no real need to seduce, but I do want for us to get along. Right. I’ve a souvenir for you as well.”

Saying that, Lyle slipped something into the palm of her hand.

As Aria confirmed it…

“… Oy, candy? Are you taking me for a child? Even Shannon wouldn’t be happy at that one.”

What was left on her palm was some candy drops. Wrapped in paper, they numbered three.

Lyle touched a hand to his chin.

“Really? When I handed her some in Galleria, she was quite delighted. She’s surprisingly simple, you know.”

Easily imagining Shannon rejoice over candy, Aria held her head.

“Of course. Of course she’d be delighted. My mistake… no! Why is my souvenir candy, dammit!”

When Aria shouted out, Elza’s eyes moved from her letter to Lyle. And Lyle assured her it was nothing, letting her go back to writing it.

“Don’t make such a ruckus. It’s because that one’s tasty, of course. And quite expensive at that.”

It was relatively popular, and for candy, it could go for more than two to three times the normal price.

“Eh? Really? Then I’ll just help myself… ah, it really is good.”

While she had looked quite displeased up to a moment ago, three drops of candy had restored Aria’s smile…

## ❼

… Elza’s letter.

‘Been a while.’

‘We’ve been able to exchange letters more frequently, and the dealings of both countries are growing smoother.’

‘I’ve heard there isn’t much a difference in climate over here and with you, and lately, there’ve been a stream of sweltering days. Please pay ample care to your body.’

‘I’ve left my thanks for the cream you sent me before with Lyle-dono. I do hope it’s to your fancy.’

‘Now then, onto the main matter. As expected, in Rusworth as well, those fearing execution are tempestuously calling for war, in the hopes of proving their innocence through the battlefield. As the high minister is currently absent, I do think we’ve lost our means of contacting your feudal lords, but it’s probably best to remain cautious.’

‘The time we will make our move is estimated to be in two weeks’ time. The numbers will be less than half last time’s, and…’

❼

… Gracia’s Letter.

‘Last letter, I received your honey. I tried spreading it on bread, and it was superb. I’ve heard it’s a specialty product of Rusworth, but that honey sure is delicious. My younger brother loved it as well.’

‘On to business, our side is prepared to move at any moment. The feudal lords were pushing themselves to scrape weapons together, but merchants have come in from Beim, and are selling them at hefty prices.’

‘According to Lyle, they’re the inventory left over from that last defensive war.’

‘Also, about the time…’

❼

… Elza’s letter.

‘Recently, there’s someone I’ve taken a liking to.’

‘But I asked a close friend, and it seems he is already dating a number of women. Speaking to numbers, it’s almost reached the

double digits. Do you think it best I gave up on love?'

❼

… Gracia's letter.

'What a coincidence. I've also found an intriguing someone.'

'He's got resourcefulness worthy of being surrounded by women, or so a close friend of mine gave her stamp of approval.'

'Also, my brother admires him dearly, so perhaps it can work out, or so I've been thinking quite a bit lately.'

'Come to think of it, the next war is going to be honored as my younger brother's first campaign, so I was wondering if you could take that into consideration.'

❼

… Elza's letter.

'Congratulations.'

'Resourcefulness, is it? It's true that resourcefulness is an important attribute for gentlemen.'

'And about your brother, me leading it personally would be unnatural. Shall I put in a word for one of my subordinates to be the ones attacking your brother's camp? After they clash, we can discern the right timing, start fighting, and have both camps stand down. Same old, same old.'

❼

… Gracia's letter.

'Yep, resourcefulness sure is important. He has a moniker, so I think the lords will have to assent.'

‘If that isn’t the case, I’m thinking of using forceful means.’

‘And about the matter with my brother. According to Lyle, it will prove difficult. There will be the movements of two camps thirsting for merits, so I’m thinking of standing them down after they’ve felt the air of the wargrounds.’

## ❼

“No more~. I don’t want to work.”

Falling over my desk, I had been repeating days of intense movement between Galleria, Rusworth, Lorphys and Beim. Every single day.

Maybe because of that, my body’s fatigue had reached its peak. When I was in such a horrid state, May was the epitome of good health.

In our base- the house in the Lorphan Village- May was spreading Rusworth honey over bread, and eating it.

The Fifth watched her delectably stuffing her cheeks. There was no doubt he was making a lovestruck expression right now.

『Hah, it sure is nice. Sure is healing. If I could, I’d give her more to eat.』

Since I was this tired and immobile, the atmosphere in the Jewel was dicey. The mood maker, the Third, was also out of it.

Rather than dispirited, it seems he was thinking over quite a lot. Milleia-san and the Seventh’s entanglements were the same as always, as they watched over the Fifth’s doting.

『In front of your own daughter, fawning over a little girl is a bit…』

The Seventh laughed.

『You’re not at an age to call yourself anyone’s daughter. Ahahaha… hah!』

I heard a gunshot from the Jewel, but it was already just the usual pattern, so I didn't even flinch from my resting place atop the desk.

Putting the last of her bread in her mouth, May hit her hands together to brush off the breadcrumbs, before turning to me.

"Lyle, do you still feel bad? Rusworth is going out for war the day after tomorrow, right? Rather, you haven't even eaten anything."

I looked at the honey bread on the table.

"… Don't need it. I don't feel like eating, so you can have it if you want. Besides, I'm definitely unnecessary, aren't I? Why do I have to go out on the battlefield? I didn't accept a request, and I'm not getting money out of it. On the contrary, I'd be going out on Vera's money, wouldn't I?"

From within the Jewel, I could hear Milleia-san's giggle voice.

『Goddess, supporting another women by being supported by one of your women, you really are a brute.』

Glad that someone's having fun here. But really, just hearing that made me sound like the worst. No, perhaps I am the worst. That's wrong. I'm the worst.

May took my bread in hand, and bit in.

"If you don't go out, we aren't moving. You've got to give orders. You're doing various things here and there, right? And wait, that little brother was really worried."

Little brother was surely Leold-kun.

It's nice that he looked up to me, but before his innocent eyes, the ancestors are filled with inexplicable sentiment, it seems. If possible, I should avoid him, or something. I've reaffirmed that the ancestors actually do have that sort of conscience.

Of all else, while we would be rebuilding Galleria and Rusworth, by our plan, we would be selling a favor, and having them fight it out.

It wasn't as if we were assisting out of good will.

“… Ah, I’m the worst. The worst damn gigolo of them all. That’s why I’ll just have Novem and the others do their best on the battlefield. Yeah, gigolo is fine. So shan’t I do nothing as a gigolo would? If it’s now, I’m sure I could become a useless bastard who wouldn’t fall short of anyone.”

There, the Seventh let a surprised voice from the Jewel.

『Just what are you trying to do, Lyle!? Up until a few days ago, you were so motivated, but come this far, it’s suddenly been nothing but no-good complaints.』

The Fifth drew back at my statements.

『Kid, saying such things right after the Fourth disappeared is…』

The Third stayed silent. Milleia-san sounded conflicted.

『Was he so motivated he tired himself out? Well, he did try a bit too hard. If he manages his health and rests a while, there shouldn’t be a problem. I’m sure he’ll be back to the usual Lyle.』

I could hear everyone’s fed-up words, but more than that, I found the fact that my body didn’t have any power in it to be more troublesome.

The sense that no force would go into my muscles, and that I didn’t want to do anything, or rather, I couldn’t build any energy.

This was the first I’d felt anything like it.

“Hah… I want to have Novem and the other girls support me.”

May continued munching into the bread as she spoke.

“Uwah, how terrible.”

She said, as she looked at me. Inside the house, Valkyrie Units one through three glared at me expressionlessly from the shadows.

What should I do… I don’t even have the energy to tell them off.

… A few days later.

On the border of Galleria and Rusworth, both armies, small scale as they were, spread out their troops and led them forth.

The trump cards of both sides, the maidens of war Gracia and Elza were stationed at the rear, and as a rare occurrence, the squadrons usually at the rear lines were glaring at each other from the forefront.

Such was the state of both camps, but at Galleria's stronghold tent, Gracia was letting her heart flutter at her brother's noble form.

The armor ordered from Beim had arrived, the worksmanship without flaw, and the ornaments elaborate.

Leold spoke with the unfamiliar armor folded over his body.

"I heard you wouldn't be moving this time, Gracia, but is that really alright?"

Gracia was also wearing armor, and nearby, a large lance, with a shield attached at the hilt, was resting horizontally on a rack.

"No problem. Because this time both sides will just be lightly hitting against one another, and retreating. From this year's winter, I'll be genuinely putting you to work, and with this, there shouldn't be any wars for a while."

From the start, the preparations were in order to have the traitors of both camps go at each other's' throats. After that, by weakening them, and pulling them back, it was possible to greatly chip down their power.

With the problem that had troubled her for long years being solved in the past few months, Gracia was in high spirits.

In the pavilion of brother and sister, Miranda stood nearby as guard for the two. Shannon was also nearby as Miranda's aide.

Shannon pulled on her sister's shoulder.

"Miranda, I wouldn't mind if you pampered me to that extent too, you

know?”

Miranda smiled as she poked Shannon’s forehead.

“Keep your sleep talk for when you’re asleep, Shannon. Now then, normally, it wouldn’t be strange for Lyle to have come here, but… since Monica’s on our side, perhaps he started out on the other camp?”

Turning an ear to Miranda’s utterance was Lyle’s admirer Leold.

“Lyle-dono is coming?

Shannon shrugged her shoulders.

“That was the plan from the start. But maybe there isn’t such a need?”

There, Leold…

“I… see… it’s a bit of a shame.”

Saying that, he gave a bitter smile. It seems he wanted Lyle to see him in his best dress for his first campaign. Sensing her brother’s sentiment.

“… I don’t see what harm there would be in letting him join our side for a bit.”

Gracia-san said…

## ❼

In Rusworth’s tent, Aria yelled at Monica, who had rushed a packed lunch all the way from Galleria.

“Monica! Just what are you thinking!?”

There, Monica shed tears, showing off her functions unnecessary to an automaton.

“I mean…! The Chicken Dickhead isn’t eating, lost his motivation, and is just lounging around! I kept worrying and worrying about his

nutritional balance! I wanted to bring him a special Monica-maid lunch!”

As Monica feigned tears, Aria grasped her left twin tail, and immediately told her to return.

“It doesn’t really matter! If you aren’t on that side, sending messages will be a pain, right! Even if the Valkyries are there…”

As long as the mass-produced Valkyries were there, they could use the line to procure information from Lyle. Like that, they could’ve establish correspondence.

Monica averted her eyes.

“… Oy.”

“That’s wrong. It isn’t me. They said if I was going to the other side, then they would too, or some nonsense…”

With Lyle’s deteriorated state as the trigger, the automatons were starting to show arbitrary action, bringing pain to Aria’s forehead.

Elza in the tent was restless. Unlike usual, she was wearing a specially made outfit for battle… apparently. It seems she was looking forward to see Lyle.

“B-but she’s already here anyways, right? Then I shall accompany her to see…”

Aria held her back with a hand.

“Novem’s gone over, so just endure it. And if you don’t keep yourself around here, the eyes of others will…”

After Aria said that much, Monica released her hair from her grasp, and stood. She gave a tidy curtsey.

“Welcome back, my master… how was it, perfect movements, weren’t they, Chicken dickwad?”

It seems Lyle had entered the tent.

When Aria looked at the entrance, she found herself at a loss for

words.

Lyle was truly sparkling. With a refreshing smile, he was in a state one wouldn't think him to have been bedridden before. And to Monica…

"The readiness to welcome me wherever you are… Monica, I'll give you a hundred points."

Aria instantly realized he wasn't the usual Lyle. And she sent a glance to Novem, standing diagonally behind him. Novem looked down, and shook her head.

"A hundred! A hundred for this Monica? You wouldn't mean the max to be a thousand, would you?"

Lyle flicked up his blue hair with the tips of his right hand.

"Don't be foolish, a perfect hundred out of a hundred. I'll even draw a flower around it."

Seeing Lyle like that, Monica began to quiver.

"He's returned. My chicken dickwad has returned… it's fever time!!"

Ignoring Monica's large cry, Aria pressed both hands to her face.

"… Why is it you're always like that at the important times?"

Novem nodded at Aria's words.

"When I went to get him, he was already… we can only try to overcome as he is."

Aria lamented, Novem gave up, and Monica started to hum. As Lyle began a grand laugh, Elza alone sat in her chair, unable to comprehend the current situation…

# 18 - Fight More

'Twas a refreshing, cloudy sky.

On such a perfect day for war, I sat on the second level of a stack of crates, and I looked down over the Valkyries dancing around.

Looking up at me, Novem, Aria and May were making enervated expressions, while Elza-san looked nervous. Surrounding eyes gathered on me, but as I was always showered with attention, this much wasn't enough to satisfy me.

The Valkyries each danced a different dance, their movements as if to encircle me making it look as if they were performing some sort of bizarre ritual.

For every one doing a beautiful waltz, there was another in a handstand, violently spinning their legs through the air. They each displayed their willful individuality, but when they all moved around in the same circle, it looked considerably ominous.

But they said it was to celebrate my recovery, so it did make me feel happy.

(I sure am a happy one. It feels a bit eerie, but they think of me so… as I thought, I'm a man who was born to be loved.)

As I looked over those Valkyries, I spoke.

"When they show off their quirks like that, I can't feel any uniformity. On the contrary, it's as if they've no quirks to speak of. But I can understand that you're all rejoicing. I, Lyle Walt… am once more in perfect form! There's no longer a need for you to worry!"

Standing on the second story wooden crate, I thrusted the fists of both hands towards the heavens, and lifted my face towards them as well.

"Hmm, the heavens are blessing me as well. It's a good thing it's cloudy without too much sunlight today."

Whether it be sunny or raining, or even if hail were to fall, in the end, it's their blessing. The man who is loved by all forms of weather must be loved across the skies.

And as a brilliant theory popped into my head.

"Muh, I've thought of something nice!"

But I could hear it from below. Yelling at me, and as if pleading for something. Looking down on Aria's earnest face felt like a bad thing to do, so I jumped down from atop the crate…

"Hup! And now for a beautiful landing!"

I landed right before Aria, taking a single deep lunge before standing. There, Aria used the hilt of the spear in her hand to hit my head.

"That hurt, did it not. Jealous? If it's candy, I've got more to give."

When I started digging through my pocket, Aria yelled.

"Idiot! Put a stop to this strange ritual already! Just look around, it's scaring everyone!"

The soldiers of Rusworth were watching the dancing Valkyries surround us. Perhaps they found it ominous, as everyone was looking on with a strange face.

"How rude of you to call it a strange ritual. They're merely dancing to celebrate my recovery. It seems they've yet to develop expression, so they're only dancing to express their emotions. If you think of it like that, isn't it cute?"

Novem shook her head to the side.

"Lyle-sama, a little longer, and a war is going to start. I believe it best to tone down actions that would lower morale. There are no absolutes on the battlefield."

Scolded by Novem, I felt there was no helping it, so I halted the dance. All operating Valkyries had assembled out of worry for my poor health, so I hadn't the slightest idea of the affairs of Galleria.

“There’s no helping it. If you say so, Novem. All of you, leave the dancing at that. I’ll leave it to you to develop synchronization for next time.”

“You’ll have them go at it again? You really are an idiot!”

On Aria’s words, I smiled.

“Hmm, if you don’t comprehend, then feel free to call me a fool. I’ll keep fighting on.”

When I said such a cool line, as anticipated, Elza-san’s face turned red. As expected of me. She’s already on the verge of falling. My own charm was a frightening thing, but it seems that Celes stole all of Septem’s power from within me. In that case, this is just my original glamor.

Novem made a bitter smile.

“Lyle-sama, please don’t pull a line from thin air to avoid the subject. What do you plan to do about this situation? Do you have no means of contacting the other side? Galleria’s side is also a battlefield, and infiltrating at this point will be difficult… it is my thoughts it bet you head over there and…”

Why not move to that side to control the battle? Such a proposal from Novem was never spoken through to its end. The one to interrupt was Elza-san.

“Ah, no… could you wait a moment? See, we’ve been exchanging letters for a while now, and today’s well… how about staying on this camp, Lyle-dono?”

Awkwardly trying to stop me, she showed off her brand new attire. Perhaps she had tried adding femininity to her knight clothing, but she was wearing a skirt, and boots that covered all the way to her thighs.

The pale skin of her face was dyed red, and her eyes were clouded.

“Very well, then I’ll stay here. Well, today’s but a clash of those that have it coming to them. There shouldn’t be a problem if I’m here.

And Elza-san.”

“Y-yes?”

As her face turned to a delighted smile, I directed a smile as well.

“You’re pulling off those clothes better than the last I saw you. I’ve been fascinated by the portion visible between your skirt and boots.”

When I gave an honest answer, Aria pinched my back. She must be jealous.

“What is it, did you want to be complemented? Fret not, Aria, you’ve got a charm only you possess. I’ve fallen deep for that heroic splendor of yours.”

As I said that with a smile, her left hand came into high-speed contact with my face.

“Why are you making plays at women even at a time like this!? And what’s heroic splendor supposed to mean!? Huh!?”

Pressing my right hand to my face, I to her.

“… Splendid slap. But please not the face. I’m busy today, so I’ll have to accompany you later. On the night’s bed if you wish.”

There, Aria’s face turned the same bright red as her hair, and she lowered her spear on me. If it hit, it would’ve really been dangerous, but if you think of it as her hiding her embarrassment, it has a cuteness to it as well.

(I get the feeling anyone but me would’ve died from that, but ‘tis a trivial matter. If Aria didn’t go this far, there’d be little worth in going at it.)

“A wonderful strike! If that hit, I would’ve died. So aren’t you glad you’re paired with me?”

“You should die once or twice to repent! Even now, you keep embarrassing us all!”

Aria’s eyes were teary, but having her call it embarrassment made me tilt my head. I think she was under some sort of

misunderstanding.

“Don’t sweat the small stuff. It’s only embarrassing because you think of it as embarrassment. But this is my standard, so it’s no problem to me. Rather, I really am busy today, so can we continue this later?”

Novem looked in my direction, touching a hand to her face, and tilting her head.

“Weren’t you just going to sit back and watch today?”

Such a Novem was cute, but Elza-san was panicking over whether to stop Aria, or leave her as she was, so to send her a life raft, I spoke.

“Well, everyone listen up. Today I’m here, so there’s no need to worry. That’s all I can say for now. That’s how it is, so I’ll be off to prepare. I’ll be back before you know it.”

Seeing me declare it so boldly, Elza-san blushed and nodded, Aria held her head, and Novem sent a conflicted smile my way as she waved me off.

I was seen off by the Valkyries, as I entered one of the tents not in use.

## ❼

When I entered the tent, I found Monica humming, as she prepared it for my use.

And as she saw me, she waved her hand with an exceedingly good smile on her face.

“Look around, Chicken Dickhead. I, Monica, have taken command of the useless scrap units one through three to prepare this tent for you! The preparations are perfect!”

I had borrowed it because I wanted a space to be alone, but Monica was already taking the initiative to spin her gears and prepare it.

I placed a hand on her shoulder.

“Thank you, Monica. You all did well. I have something I want to think over alone for a while. So could you go and help out outside? I’ll come for you soon. I’m relying on all of you.”

When I directed a smile, Valkyrie Units One through Three assumed poses. They opened their mouthes at the same time.

“Leave it to me! This perfect Valkurie One!”
“Special model Unit Two will actualize her master’s orders!”
“More than One and Two, Unit Three shall serve her master.”

They posed together, but their messages were all over the place. Monica looked over the three machines, and scoffed.

“For automatons to not match breath, blatantly doing nothing but flashing their forced individuality… my eyes can’t endure it.”

The Valkyries expanded the binders on their back, and tried to take their weapons out when I hit my hands together.

“Hey, it’s time for work.. You three take command of the other Valkyries outside. Monica, I’m assigning you to Novem.”

“Understood. I shall show you how different I am from these degraded bootlegged shams!”

Following Monica, who burst off, the three Valkyries left the tent.

And a Third Generation Head holding in his laughter spoke to me.

『So are you up to form today, mr. lyle? I’ve the feeling your firepower has been lacking so far. But more importantly, do you have a plan? If you don’t send the Valkyries, or go directly to Galleria’s camp yourself…』

The Third sounded worried, but there weren’t any problems for me.

“It’s alright. I’ll just be hiding this time. Well, it’s a good opportunity to put a stop to this stream of conspired warfare. When the ones drinking the good stuff learn just how dangerous of a situation they’ve been placed in, they’ll quiet down some. In the end, they’ll

either think they're dead meat, or actually drop dead."

In regards to me, the Fifth sounded a little surprised.

『… Oy, the plan was to have the traitors clash and weaken each other, wasn't it?』

He said. I had thought so as well, but there was a more suitable option in this situation, so I merely chose to choose it.

And I had concern from the start.

"There's the possibility that there are those who've been having exchanges behind the scenes like Gracia and Elza. It's not a stretch to think they'd try to make it look like they're desperately fighting on. Because even if they throw their populaces at one another, it will all be fine as long as they survive themselves."

The Seventh sounded impressed at my opinion.

『So you noticed, Lyle. No, mr. lyle. But even so, that doesn't change the fact they'll suffer heavy casualties. If you cut down the number of lords or officials any further, the countries won't be able to move. Thinking of the balance, this matter is a peaceful one.』

The Seventh tried to persuade me, but surprisingly enough, the Third and Milleia-san supported my position. And the opinions of the Jewel were divided in half.

(… With an even number of them, majority vote becomes difficult.)

While the Fifth and Seventh tried to talk me out of it, the Third.

『How about we let mr .lyle do as he likes? I want to see what sort of result that one will bring about. What's more, if he worsens the situation, then worse comes to worst, we pull those two leaders out and book it.』

Milleia-san was of the same opinion.

『Just a little more to bag them after all. Good grief, if he was just this assertive on a regular basis, I'd never get tired of walking. The gap is important, but he needs to fix up his usual hesitation a little

more, I see.』

She handed down some harsh words, but if I take it as her worry for me, it isn't bad at all. And it's not like I'm wishing for the worst case scenario.

"You're mistaken there. It's not like I've an intent to pull those two from their positions. They're both specialized to leading troops and fighting on the battlefield. In that case, this is quite the appropriate situation."

The Fifth consented to that one. But he showed disapproval to an alteration of the plan.

『I have to agree to that. I agree… but in that case, there's no need to go out of your way to do something akin to gambling, right?』

The Seventh as well.

『Making hasty revisions and making a situation where you can't get the two to fall will be troublesome. And wait, the conversation's naturally turned towards seducing them, but I guess that just shows Lyle's growth… in various ways.』

Hearing the opinions of the ancestors, I burst into laughter. I couldn't hold it in anymore.

Milleia-san.

『What's up, Lyle?』

After clearing my throat, I boldly declared to the vacant tent. Spreading both my hands, and looking up at the ceiling, I could see the lumber supporting its structure.

"You're mistaken, my good people! It's not that this Lyle Walt is seducing anyone! When you get to my level, the women you set your eyes on go and fall of their own accord!"

After a little silence, the Third laughed out loud.

『For his overconfidence to go this far, as expected of mr. lyle. But whether they fall by themselves, or get seduced, if it fails, won't it be

fatal? And have you forgotten you're regularly connected by line to Monica-chan and the others? They can determine your location instantly.』

Right, just as I could tell their position, they could sense mine as well. So even if I hid, and stayed silent, they'd come to find me. If I told them, I think they'd listen to my orders, but that just wouldn't be any fun.

I had thought to test it out, so I decided to make use of this opportunity.

I took out the sword I'd borrowed from Aria. A type of Magic Tool, and something handed down by a skilled knight during the invasion of Selva, apparently.

I smiled.

"It's fine. If I use this, it'll create an interference with the Jewel, and throw the line into disarray. I can't usually use Magic Tools, but tools are all about how you use them. I can run away whenever I want. FWAHAHAHA!!"

If you used a Magic Tool, it would interfere with the Jewel and disable it. Because of that, I had never used them before. But they were quite a convenient thing to have at a time like this.

When I raised a grand laugh as I said that, the Third suddenly burst into a panic.

『… Eh? Wait a second! In that case, we won't be able to watch mr. lyle's–』

The Seventh was also flustered.

『Y-you can't, Lyle! That method brings no joy to any of us! How about we think of a different means and…』

Milleia-san began scolding me.

『Lyle, when the festival finally comes, it's unfair if I don't get to enjoy it with everyone else. Understood. I'll also assist, so how about you put the Magic Tool down, and talk things out? Look, if you just send

your consciousness over to the Jewel for a bit, it'll be over before you know it.』

I'm sure they planned to use the magic of persuasion too prevent me from using the Magic Tool. If it was Milleia-san, perhaps she would actually be able to pull it off, so I gave a laugh.

"It's too late! I, Lyle Walt… Have a principle of doing what I set out to do! I'm not the sort of man to give in to threats! Well then, fare thee well!"

When I drew the blade, and flowed Mana in, the Skills bestowed on the metal activated, and interfered with the Jewel. They both messed with one another, and the voices I could hear from the Jewel became broken and disconnected.

At the end, the Fifth.

『Not my… -blem…… -ore.』

He said. I continued pouring Mana into the sword, returning it to its scabbard as I flipped my hair.

"What, I'll be back in time for the main event, and I'll release it these. Just wait a little."

I muttered aware of the fact they couldn't hear me.

"You should really have patience once in a while, dear ancestors of mine."

Giving a grin, I exited the tent, and concealed myself. It was all to get both sides to fight seriously.

## ❼

… As both camps glared at one another, Gracia sent Miranda as a messenger.

Even when this was a farce of a war, it was still her brother's first campaign. She wanted to have Lyle by his side.

Officially, they weren't supposed to have any means to contact him, so as a front, they had to dispatch someone. But Miranda had given a vague explanation, and all that was left was to wait for the man himself to arrive.

Restless as she waited, Gracia looked over the inside of her tent as she awaited the return of messenger Miranda.

As she couldn't calm down, the surrounding lords likely thought her irritated, as they hung their heads in silence.

Leold tried to be tactful.

"Gracia, even if you don't puch such pressure on your surroundings… I'm sure everyone will fight to their fullest."

Hearing those words, Gracia began putting on a play with him.

"Hmm, those words hold no weight when they come from one ignorant of the battlefield. When there could still be traitors among us, who can say when my head will be cut in my sleep. I've said I would depend on the loyalty of everyone present today, but…"

Thinking over how awkward it was to say such things to her cute little brother, Gracia continued acting, when Miranda returned to the tent. Gracia swallowed down her joy, and took on an imposing attitude.

"So you've come. How has Rusworth replied?"

The lords all remained mindful of what the messenger was about to say. Miranda got onto a knee.

"… Unable, is the reply."

Miranda couldn't give a detailed explanation in this situation, so she just gave a brief relay of the result.

As Gracia stood, she thought to herself.

(What does he mean he's unable!? He just has to show himself a little more on this side, does he not? Can't he just care about me a little m… w-wait! Since he's the person Elza likes, could it be she…)

Standing still, Gracia remained silent for a while before opening her mouth again.

“… Once more. Messenger, I’ll have you go to Rusworth’s camp once more. Everyone else, to your stations!”

Sending the lords back to their own armies, with only those concerned left in the tent, Gracia spoke.

“Miranda-chan, what do you mean it isn’t happening!?”

As she approached Miranda as if to cling on to her, Miranda scratched her face with a finger.

“No, um… they can’t find Lyle, it seems.”

Gracia spoke immediately.

“Wait, you said that automaton called Monica-chan naturally get into contact with him! What’s more, having all units move to that side wasn’t part of the… it couldn’t be.”

The worst possibility floated in her head. A delusion of if Elza had noticed her feelings, and stolen Lyle away.

“That biiitttccch!!”

When Gracia raised her voice, Leold frantically stepped on to soothe her…

“Gracia, wait! There may be someone around! And he may have his own circumstances!”

## ❼

… In Rusworth, the Valkyries fidgeted as they searched all through the camp.

Monica was sitting, cradling her knees in Elza’s tent. The line was cut, so she couldn’t supply herself from Lyle’s Mana pool. At a time like this, she was making sure not to take needless movements, and run out of energy. So she remained on standby.

But perhaps the individual herself wanted to go, as she wouldn't stop mumbling to herself.

"If I didn't part from the Chicken dickwad there… not being by his side during his fever time, I'm a failure as a maid. This Monica is no Monica. God dammit… dammit all…"

Seeing Monica in a corner of the tent, staring at a support beam and talking to herself, Aria let out a sigh.

"Just because you can't get in contact for a bit? Lyle's got considerable skill himself, and I'm sure he'll be fine. Right, No… vem?"

When Aria looked at Novem standing to her side, she took a step back and took some distance.

"… Eh? Did you say something? What could it be? Oh, do you happen to know where Lyle-sama is? Is he back yet? I should go search for… no, but I've been ordered to stay… what should I do?"

Completely expressionless. And a voice without any inflection, she wasn't the usual Novem whose smile would never go extinct. She was wobbling a bit, grasping the Forxuz House's heirloom staff in her hand much stronger than usual.

Aria looked at Elza. In the tent, sitting in her chair, Elza was also worrying for Lyle.

"I tried to find him when that messenger person came for him, but since he wasn't there, I had to decline… the timing matches up too well."

Aria noticed Elza was acting strange, and was about to try lulling her with words he would return in no time, when she recalled her last conversation with the man.

(Wait, just now, he… said he was just going to be watching, yet he was going to be busy.)

Then isn't this part of Lyle's plan? She was about to bring that up, when Elza stood.

“She did it. That woman… come to think of it, her letter said she had someone she liked. No matter how you look at it, that was Lyle-dono, right! Pretending to send a messenger, she really snatched him away!”

As Elza worked herself up, Aria tried to say it wasn’t the case. She tried.

“There’s no way that’s true. Miranda is our com—”
“—The possibility exists. It’s Miranda-san, after all.”

Novem quietly muttered. Her usual discontentments, or perhaps unconsciously, the girl herself didn’t sound too mindful of what she had said. But she couldn’t’ permit a situation where Lyle was unaccounted for, it seems.

There, Elza grabbed a nearby staff, left the tent, and wrung out her voice.

“Gather the generals at once! There’s been a change of plans. I shall personally…”

After saying that much, a soldier raced over, and informed her. His knees shaking to Elza’s bloodcurling atmosphere.

“E-Elza-sama! The messenger has come from Galleria again…”

There stood Miranda behind the soldier.

“Have you found Lyle yet? If possible, I’d like to take him back quickly. We’ve got circumstances of our own.”

Aria leapt out of the tent, and looked at the messenger’s face. But Elza turned her staff to Miranda.

“When you’ve abducted Lyle-dono yourself, you have quite the nerve. Go tell that woman. That I’ll never conspire with her again to the end of this world. I’ll have him snatched back.”

On Elza’s proclamation, Miranda made a blank expression, before looking at Aria. Elza immediately headed for her generals, and Novem unsteadily followed along.

Miranda to Aria.

“What happened? What do you mean Lyle isn’t here? And it sounds like she thinks I’m the one who took him.”

Aria hurriedly tried to convey the present situation. But the problem lay in that this sort of thing was Aria’s weak point. After all, having heard her explanation, Miranda…

“… That woman, when I thought she was staying quiet, she goes and does quite some nasty things.”

Seeing Miranda’s shoulders shake, Aria thought it was a mistake.

“T-that’s wrong! Novem was also acting strange because Lyle was gone. I’m sure it’s because she’s…!”

But without listening to Aria’s explanations, Miranda turned, and headed for the horse she’d come one.

And she spoke to Aria.

“Go tell Novem. ‘If that’s how you’re going to play it, I’ve got some cards of my own’. Also, Aria, go and find Lyle already… or could it be you’re in cahoots with that woman?”

Looking into Miranda’s eyes, Aria stepped back again, and shook her head. Miranda smiled and spoke to Aria.

“I see, that’s good. You’re my friend, Aria. I trust you won’t betray me.”

Aria couldn’t take Miranda’s words at face value. She was usually quite tactless, but looking at Miranda’s bloodthirsty smile, it’s not as if she could remain oblivious.

That was a warning.

Aria could understand that.

(W-what are you going to do about this, Lyle~!)

On the verge of tears, Aria ran off to search for Lyle, who’d disappeared off somewhere…

# 19 - The Witches

… The first movements came in the two glaring camps as each's representatives came to stand at the lead.

At first, the two known names of Gracia and Elza hadn't even been on the battlefield. But suddenly showing their motivation, they held more fighting spirit than ever before as they stood at the front.

Around them, the various traitors and ones benefitting at others' expense were lined up.

A cloudy sky.

On the stormy border battlefield, Gracia mounted her horse, a spear as tall as her grasped in her right hand. The grip was long, and it had a small shield attached.

To Gracia, who let off her rage, the surrounding lords.

"Grand Duke Proxy, would it not be dangerous to go out on the battlefield without any attendants? Up to now, those of the Grand Duke House have always been by your side."

"Even if you're to leap out, then in that case our turn shall never…"

One of the feudal lords giving a troubled smile received a harsh glare. Gracia's violet eyes were filled with malice.

"And what of it? You all need only fight as well. Or have you forgotten how you've always dispatched me to the front, retreating to the rear lines yourselves?"

"T-that is…"

To the Lord, Gracia went on.

"… Fret not, I'll hold down that witch for you. So you all are to fight the enemies before your eyes. That's all there is to it, right?"

Sensing the atmosphere that would take no more words, the lords

nodded together this time alone. Among them were some who even gave vulgar smiles.

If Gracia started her battle, it seems they planned to flee due to the danger.

After looking over such lords of her country, Gracia turned her eyes to Elza in the distance…

❼

… At Gracia glaring at her, Elza took a posture as if too look down on her from a high point.

On horseback, she held up her staff, tapping that mace-like rod against her shoulder a number of times.

Her atmosphere different from usual, the surrounding soldiers were perplexed.

“Elza-sama?”

Elza remained expressionless.

“You all shall fight the enemy before you. You volunteered for this role yourselves, so you’re at least to do that much.”

But the one leading the soldiers was making a pale face.

“You can’t! What if we get dragged into your battle with the witch!?”

Anyone dragged into the battles of Elza and Gracia would die, he appealed, but Elza remained expressionless.

“And what of it?”

She didn’t turn the slightest ear. To Elza, and to Gracia, they were only clashing two camps of traitors by Lyle’s plan. Even if one party turned coat along the way, they had no intent to revise the program.

“N-nothing…”

When the soldier chief who had been commuting with the enemy

shut his mouth, Elza let her hair flutter in the wind. She used her left hand to brush away the locks pressed against her face, her violet eyes letting off a cold light.

“I’m definitely not forgiving you today. Gracia…”

Elza and Gracia. Both sides’ fighting spirit had risen to a level it had never reached before…

❼

… When she heard the signal to attack, sitting on Porter’s roof, Miranda grasped the collar of Shannon, who was clinging to her clothing from behind, not looking ahead at all.

“Shannon, confirm Novem’s position. If Aria is there, then tell me.”

Seeing Miranda’s smile, Shannon violently nodded her head up and down. Not because she was able to see her face, but because her Mana flow told her that her sister was seriously angry.

Shannon wasn’t stupid enough to resist Miranda when she was like that.

Near Miranda, Porter’s driver Clara held her staff as it to embrace it, pushing her glasses up with her fingertips to restore their positioning.

“Novem-san pushed the blame onto you? Rather, isn’t she the one who didn’t notice when Lyle-san disappeared under her nose?”

Shannon didn’t say anything as she frantically scanned the battlefield in motion, but as she observed her sister’s reactions, Miranda addressed Clara.

“Since it’s Lyle, I’m sure he’s fine. But if his disappearance is to throw off all our plans, then Novem is in need of some retribution. Since Lyle won’t hand down punishment, isn’t it proper for we to be the ones to do it?”

Clara indifferently.

“I won’t call it proper, but it does bother me why Novem-san would

say such a thing. And wait, you plan on making me support you?”

Miranda smiled.

“Of course. I mean, it will be difficult for me alone.”

Not saying a word that she wouldn’t be able to defeat Novem, Miranda was also an exception. Clara let out a sigh, and decided to follow Miranda’s side this time.

But.

“Well, the biggest problem is really the fact that Lyle-san disappeared, though.”

When Clara muttered that, Shannon raised a large voice.

“There! She’s there! I found her, sis! She’s coming straight at us!”

When Shannon hurriedly said that, Miranda turned to Clara.

“I see. Aria isn’t with her. Then Clara… could you close in on Novem?”

Clara moved her staff, setting Porter in motion. With its body like an armored vehicle, Porter stood out even on the battlefield.

Miranda had conviction that Novem would come her way without a doubt.

“Now I’ll have you repent, Novem!”

Perhaps she had heard Miranda’s voice, but Novem continued racing her horse straight at the party…

## ❼

… Leaping off her horse, Gracaa swung her spear to the side.

As flames covered her surroundings, a pillar of ice manifested in front of her. The ice that wouldn’t easily melt, even in Gracia’s flames, could only have been produced by Elza.

Elza swung down her staff from atop the ice, while Gracia took the blow with her spear.

That strike one wouldn't think had come from a magician violently threw Gracia towards the ground.

But…

"You traitoorr!!"

Gracia turned her left hand to the earth, opening her palm, and from it fire gushed out with good momentum, killing the force, and contrarily, pushing Elza back.

Sent flying with the spear, Elza let her body to one turn as she corrected her positioning and landed. The ice she had created melted, flooding the ground. The force of the surrounding inferno weakened some.

On the maddened battlefield of hot and icy air, the two faced one another.

Elza turned her staff towards Gracia.

"You're the one who betrayed first!!"

A few hundred spears made of ice manifested. The tips of those spears that had appeared in thin air as if to surround Gracia, were clad in an incredibly cold aura, letting off a white smoke.

They all came at her at once, but Gracia only spread her feet a bit, and let flame blow out from her own body.

As that pale blue flame covered her form, the spears of ice evaporated before they could pierce into her, and disappeared.

Within the vapor enveloping everything in fog, Elza held up her staff, freezing over its top to produce a giant blade of ice. Swinging it back with one hand, she blew the fog away.

The motion had been to block the serious blow to impale her from behind.

Elza's blade of ice had begun to melt, but without paying that any

mind, she lowered it down on Gracia.

“… Fire bullet.”

An elementary level projectile magic, and one difficult to land a fatal blow with. Akin to smashing a small mass of Mana against an opponent.

But taken up to Gracia’s class, the Bullet magic was quite a convenient one due to its invocation speed.

From her protruding left hand, several fireballs a few meters across were produced.

Elza clicked her tongue.

“Che… Ice Wall!”

Swiping her left hand to the side, she produced a wall of ice before her, that’s thickness exceeded ten meters.

The large impacting fireballs raised a white smoke, as they shaved the wall away.

To get the drop on her opponent in that time space, Elza began moving, only to open her eyes wide as she looked at the ice she had created.

There, she saw the emerging form of Gracia, who had pierced her way through it.

Hurriedly, she made an ice shield, but unable to kill the momentum, Elza was sent flying. The wettened earth had turned to mud, and Elza was covered in it. Whirled up mud frose over, several brown pillars of ice forming around.

Standing up, Elza looked down at her own clothing.

“You muscle head!”

With enough force to freeze all the clouded land around, a cold air started to blow with Elza at the case. Gracia defended her eyes from the storm of frost as she began to feel the ground under her feet ice over.

“You magic fool!”

Raising the output of the pale flame surrounding her, Gracia instantly began to melt the ice around her.

The battlefield occasionally experienced colds that exceeded the greatest of winters, other times assailed by heats surpassing summer, an unthinkable situation…

❼

… On a different field, Novem faced Miranda one on one.

No, Miranda was receiving support from Shannon and Clara, so it couldn’t exactly be called a one on one duel.

Novem was fighting with her staff in the form of a scythe, but the moment she moved to use magic, Shannon atop Porter cried out.

“N-next is fire! A real large pillar-type one!”

She knew what Novem would fire before she used it, and Miranda moved to crush her invocation.

In a state of affairs where she was unable to use any magic, Novem was forced to fight Miranda in close quarters.

With two daggers in her hands, Miranda dexterously parried a lowering of the scythe, before going right into a kick.

Jumping back, Novem offered a line.

“You’re still up and kicking.”

Unlike usual, she muttered in an expression from which one could barely feel any emotion. Miranda made sure not to let her smile die out.

“Oh my, I’m sorry for that. Even so, when we’re preemptively crushing every action you make, you’re not crumbling at all. Do you have no concept of impatience?”

Novem felt Clara's presence circling around from behind, and instantly began moving.

The battle didn't have the flashiness of Elza and Gracia's, but the soldiers that had tried to step in were collapsed on the ground all the same.

Soldiers of both camps had approached, thinking they could defeat the girls. So they were sinking into the muddy earth.

Miranda let her feet sink in deep, kicking off to accelerate at once, sending grime flying behind her.

Novem discerned Miranda's consecutive attacks, as the distance between the two of them decreased.

"… Do you know where Lyle-sama is?"

From the start, that was the line Novem wouldn't stop repeating. Miranda laughed.

"I don't. But I see… Novem, right now, you're already considerably distracted!"

"…!"

Novem's expression changed ever-so-slightly. Not overlooking the slightest gap of negligence, Miranda immediately took to action.

When she thrust a daggers out, Novem dodged. But Miranda let go of that dagger, grabbing Novem's ponytail, forcefully slamming her head into the ground.

Coupled with the slippery ground, she had used Novem's opening to slam her down.

But…

"Miranda, get back!"

On Shannon's words, Miranda instantly jumped back, as a wind danced around Novem. The water in the ground began to move unnaturally in the wind, as it swirled with Novem at the center.

And as Novem stuck a hand into the mud to stand, around her of mud, snakes of mud started to form. One, two, until in the end, nine had taken shape.

Without wiping the mud off of her face, Novem changed her staff to a spear shape. One of the large snakes let Novem rest on its head, and lifted her into the air.

“As I thought, Miranda-san, you’re skilled. I’m thankful that you’ll wield that power for Lyle-sama’s sake. But… don’t let it get to your head.”

It was different from the usual Novem. Different from the indifferent voice she had been using as well. On that voice full of indistinct emotion, Miranda felt a chill run down her spine. But that’s all it was.

“You don’t possibly think you were the only one hiding their abilities? Then how about this.”

The ground under Miranda’s feet swelled, slowly giving way to show the large figure of a cat-like animal.

Seeing that magic, Clara clicked her tongue.

“Che… Golem production and manipulation. So you could do it dammit. Then say something sooner.”

Shannon took some distance from a Clara scarier than usual shrinking her body from the place that had become a battlefield of large-scale golems.

Novem looked at Miranda.

“A cat, is it? It really is cute.”

A Novem showed off her leisure, Miranda declared.

“Who said that’s all there was to it, I wonder?”

Showing a smile, the quadrupedal feline golem of mud stood on two legs, growing a mane, and baring its fangs. From its back sprouted six thick sets of arms. Each held a weapon of its own, and as its body was covered in armor, there a beastly warrior stood.

The serpent and beast's eyes shined, as their battle began to stand out in a way that didn't fall short of Gracia and Elza's…

## ❼

May and Eva.

Along with the two of them, on a hill a little away from the battlefield, I sat and watched.

Around were the elves Eva had brought along, and they were excitedly inspecting the battlefield with memo pads in hand. Among them were some even drawing pictures.

May sat munching on some bread, while Eva was looking at me with a cramped smile.

I looked at the battlefield as I spoke.

"It's a tempest. Novem and the others are having a giant clash of monsters. Don't you think it truly is worth seeing?"

I smiled gently at Eva as I brushed my hair. Eva shook her head to the side.

"Lyle, why are you all the way over here?"

To her question, I gave a simple answer.

"Because I walked here with May."

"Why aren't you taking command of the battlefield?"
"There are a few circumstances behind it, and being here is most interesting."

"Why are the two maidens of war, and our party seriously going at each other's' throats!?"
"For me!"

For such beautiful women to fight over me, it reminded me of how sinful a man I was. But it really was necessary, so I wouldn't go in to stop them. Not yet, at least.

It wasn't yet the time to put a stop to it.

"You, do you understand you're the one who made this situation? Just how do you plan to settle it later!?"

To my cute little Eva, who was so worried for me, I shrugged my shoulders.

"Don't worry, Eva… I'm confident I'll steal the limelight. Just look around. Don't you think the battlefield is the perfect place for the maidens of war to confess?"

Eva covered her face with her left hand.

"I knew you would grow the harem, but adding them at the same time is idiotic. And growing it this far, if you become emperor, it's only going to grow even further."

I raised a grand laugh.

"FWAHAHAHA! Fret not, they've already fallen. All that's left is for me to pick them up. And you see… when I become emperor, I'll give the rest of my life to you guys and the people."

When my face turned serious, as I thought, my features were splendid, as no matter what I said, it would make for a painting. I'm sure the surrounding elves would pass down my sublimity for eternities to come.

"… Nihil's girl's been caught by a strange one, hasn't she?"
"But if he goes that far, it does look like it'll be fun. Crushes the Holy Knight image, so I don't really want to look at it."
"Being a little unfortunate is much more fun than perfection. See, that element of surprise thing."

They weren't able to give me a precise evaluation. I knew it already, but as I thought, I'm a man to be above understanding.

"Hmm, so I'm above understanding even before I reach the history books? I really am a man who was born worthy the name of emperor!"

To me, May, who had finished up her bread, offered a line.

“Lyle, I get the feeling your definition of ‘above understanding’ is different from the one I know of.”

It seems I have a need to get May to understand my incomprehensibility. Eva ignored me, and started recording the battlefield’s state. Seeing how her face was a little red, I noticed she was just hiding her embarrassment after all.

“Well, leaving that aside. What timing should I rush in… the timing is important after all.”

I pondered over the right time for my entrance.

# 20 - Battlefield Tactician

Riding May to the back lines of Galleria's camp, I set course for the tent Leold-kun was in.

"Whoa, you can even see them from here. Fiddlesticks… if it was going to be this interesting, I should've gotten a box seat."

On my voice, May looked to the side. A large hole had been formed, as the earth was gouged out by the magic that had come flying over.

"Don't worry about it. In a sense, I think you always have the box seat, Lyle. I've come to understand quite a few things these days."

A giant serpent boasting nine heads, and an eight-armed beastly warrior. Next door, a giant soldier of flames was fighting a monster of womanly form made of ice. That side likely saw Novem and co.'s magic, were impressed by its output, and decided to test it out for themselves.

(When it comes to magic, those two have talent. In contrast to Aria's specialization in close combat, their fortes both lie in long-ranged magic battles, huh.)

Thinking this was truly interesting, I arrived at the bustling tent of Galleria. Leold-kun looked at me.

"Lyle-dono!!"

He clung onto me. With teary eyes, and a face so pale he might fall over at any instant.

"Yep, I'm Lyle-dono. Now then, Leold-kun… how about we get you some medals on your first campaign?"

As I stuck up my thumb, I notified Leold-kun of how a squadron of Rusworth was approaching. It seems a portion of the feudal lords had intentionally let Rusworthian soldiers slip by.

It was because I had observed such a scene, that I had come to the

tents of Galleria. While the others were flashily stealing the eyes of the battlefield, I planned to have this side plainly earn some exploits.

“No, um…! Can we not do that after stopping my sister!?”

I gave a laugh.

“No, that one’s quite interesting, or rather, it’s necessary, so let them continue. They have to run out of gas. And having them worn out is most convenient for me.”

Saying that, I had Leold-kun gather the surrounding soldiers, and get in formation to intercept the Rusworth squadron.

I moved to pure support, stopping at answering questions if asked, as I looked over Leold-kun’s command. His deployment wasn’t bad or anything, and if I had to say, it felt safe.

He had the fundamentals down, and he was doing alright, so I let him surround the soldiers trying for a surprise attack, pincering them when they came in.

On such a flashy battlefield, this was the only place you’d find simple warfare, but achievements were still achievements.

Even if fifty soldiers who infiltrated, resolved for death, were surrounded and defeated by close to three hundred, achievements were achievements.

“You’ve earned some merit in your first campaign. Okay, with this, you’re now a splendid knight.”

I had Leold-kun earn some service, and as I put him on the cleanup, I watched the battlefield of giant golems.

“… If the Fourth were here, he’d probably say we could charge money for that one.

Muttering that, I called May over.

❼

… Gracia manipulated a giant of fire.

“I see, with this, the output increases, and the scope grows!”

Similarly, having produced a giant of ice, Elza latched onto the female-shaped giant’s hair ornament as she controlled it from atop its head.

Sitting on the flame giant’s shoulder, Gracia, dodged the magic flying at her from the side, as she sent a glance in that direction.

One of the serpent heads was turned her way. To be more precise, Miranda’s golem had wrenched it that way, but it was still a fact she was attacked.

“Getting in the way…”

When she thought to get back it, Elza’s golem came in for a body blow. Passing straight through the flames, the ice golem grew more slender.

But Elza’s figure had disappeared from it.

“… Above!”

Gracia looked up, to see Elza make a giant sword of her staff, and lower it.

But Elza’s body did a sudden turn in the air as she shot away. Gracia looked in Novem’s direction, finding the serpent heads entangled around the beast, the beastly warrior’s mouth turned this way.

Mana gathered, and a blast of air shot out of the beast’s mouth.

Dragged into the gale, Gracia’s golem of flame lost shape. Proof that she had yet to get used to the art of controlling and maintaining golems.

There, from behind, the melted slender hand of the ice golem grasped her body.

Elza raced down the arm of her own golem, as she approached her.

“Got you!!”

She tried to draw a line across Gracia's neck with her sword. But perhaps Elza was also immature in handling, as Gracia enveloped her body in flame, melted through the hand, and continued her downward plummet.

The melted and gouged out golems fell onto the devastated plains, giving Gracia a shortness of breath.

Elza's ice split, her golem crumbled, and she descended in front of her. Both sides were taxed for air.

They had performed an unfamiliar art, but for both of them, this was also the first they had given their all to fight for so long. Their stamina distribution was in a disarray..

With Novem and Miranda's battle carrying out above them, the two faced one another, holding up their weapons.

This strike would be the end of it… or it would have been, when a voice came down from the sky.

"Both sides lower your weapons! Look around!"

It was Lyle…

❼

… Aria had come all the way to the point from which the elves had been observing the battlefield.

Using her Skill consecutively, racing all around the battlefield, Aria collapsed before Eva, out of breath.

"… Where's Lyle?"

As Aria's sweat flowed and fell, Eva held out a flask, and pointed to the sky. She heartlessly informed Aria that it was too late.

"He's over there at the moment. See, it's already the climax."

Receiving Eva's smile of despair, Aria looked towards the indicated direction. There, in the light streaming from the gaps between the

clouds, she could see the form of Lyle atop a quilin.

Still on the ground, Aria felt her consciousness grow faint. Within all that.

“I’m definitely never forgiving you for this one, you hear. Lyle…”

She put her anger at Lyle to mouth…

## ❼

Everyone looked at me as I straddled quilin-form May.

Receiving the eyes of the battleground’s soldiers, I slowly had her descend.

All eyes gathering, Novem and Miranda returned the giant golems they had produced to dirt.

The grounds were terrible.

That Novem and Miranda’s further Grown power had risen this far was a happy miscalculation. My heart was filled with laughter, but the eyes both of them sent me were colder than usual.

Novem looked like she was truly angry, while Miranda looked like she wasn’t satisfied yet. She likely planned to win against Novem.

Descending onto the ground, I wrung out my voice from atop May’s back.

“Look around you!”

It wasn’t just Elza and Gracia around, the soldiers of both cams dragged into Novem and Miranda’s battle were strewn around the earth.

It was truly a horrid spectacle, but it’s also true I was aiming for it.

(Betraying, and trampling others underfoot to make tasty memories for themselves, but come this far, they do have my pity.)

Those cowering in fear, or rendered immobile were the majority.

Thinking of all they had done up to now, perhaps it was a considerably light punishment.

(But we've trampled the weak to get here ourselves. Now then, the time has come to put the Fourth's teachings to practice!)

I looked around me.

"How deplorable! Not just enemies, enveloping allies as well! There are no winners to be found in this war! If you fight any more, than I, Lyle Walt, shall be your opponent!"

Drawing the sword Aria had entrusted to me, when I held it out towards the heavens, the soldiers of both camps fell to their knees.

They likely never imagined it would be a fight of this level. And at the same time, they had never realized the level of the existences they had been making use of.

To add onto that, I was able to show them there were even more of that level in the world outside.

(Perfect. I'm perfect!)

Gracia and Elza… if the two of them worked together, and fought Novem and Miranda, what would have happened… it's possible they would have lost.

But at present, with their pacing out of order, the two of them looked like they would collapse. Timing-wise, isn't that just the best?

Moving some things behind the scene, small as it may be, I was able to get Leold-kun some achievements. The result of this bout had become something I could be satisfied with.

Of both camps' soldiers came those that dropped their weapons. One, and then another, the armaments fell.

I dismounted May, and walked across the muddy ground, looking down over the two women who had collapsed at the knees.

"… Good grief, doing something like that."

When I said that with some tiredness in my voice, the two women

older than me awkwardly lowered their eyes. I thought they had no immunity to men, and this is truly fantastic.

“This shouldn’t have been part of the plan, was it.”

Gracia-san began to mumble.

“No, at first I wanted for you to see Leold at his hour of triumph, and… that was all. Yet you pulled out all the automatons, and didn’t leave say a word.”

Elza-san looked up at me.

“T-that’s wrong! It was because the messenger kidnapped… that I…”

I shook my head. After that, they kept speaking of how they dispatched messengers because I was taken, raising each other’s shadows into monsters. It was just as I thought, making me fear my own wit.

(Now then, I’d best get them to fall first.)

Looking over the two with a cold look, I spoke with a freezing tone.

“Since when was I your subordinate? And by your bearing, it’s as if you see me as some sweetheart, do you not? Let me say it clearly. I belong to neither of you.”

Boldly, I said it full of self-confidence. Both Gracia and Elza looked down, their expressions turning regretful. It looked like they were embarrassed of themselves.

It seems they were aware they were counting their chickens before they hatched.

(Now.)

“I belong to neither of you. But you’re both already mine. I won’t forgive it if you go and get injured by yourselves. Look, show me your faces.”

When I crouched and brushed the dirt off their faces, they stared at me blankly. And their faces flushed. As I thought, my face must be

top-class in the continent.

If I smile, most things tend to work themselves out. When the two of them stood, I spoke.

“Your everythings belong to me. So serve me henceforth. If you do… I’ll give you the future of the man who shall get the continent in his hands.”

Extremely worn out, the fact their judgement had been dulled was an important point. Wear them out enough that they wouldn’t feel something off in this peculiar flow, then be kind.

(Fourth… at this moment, I’m putting your teachings to practice. Build a mood, wear people out to steal their judgement, and be kind to women… it’s all because of what you’ve taught me.)

He said that making the mood was important. But weakening decisiveness and making them panic was supposed to be about battle. I’ve never heard anything about being cold to women before being kind to them… but think of it as a practical application, and there isn’t a problem.

There, both of them looked quite moved…

“Yes. I swear it on this spear.”

“And I on my staff, Lyle-dono… sama, I shall work for you.”

Perhaps they really didn’t have any immunity to men, as they were both looking at me with sparkling eyes. How cute, is it not. But there were quite some different eyes coming at us from around.

Looking just at the result…

(Alright, Mission Compleeete!!)

## ❼

I carried Elza and Gracia to their respective camps on May.

While that was happening, I was surrounded by Rusworthian

officials, and interrogated.

‘You said it, did you not!? That the queen belonged to you!? You’ll take responsibility for those words, right!!?’

Galleria was the same. The lords surrounding Leold-kun.

‘You’ll take her, won’t you? If that was a lie, it will truly be troubling. Truly, truly troubling, you hear!’

They said. They had rampaged around too flashily. Both sides had come to understand just how dangerous a situation they were in.

And after clashing seriously for the first time, Elza and Gracia should have gotten a measure of their own abilities.

Ending this and that, I returned to my own tent, to find my own comrades in wait, with dubious expressions on their faces.

I had worried Novem, so she was looking at me with harsher eyes than usual.

Miranda was smiling, but her eyes were not. I’m sure she was angry that I disappeared some time along the way.

Aria made an enervated expression as she glared at me. I’m sure she had looked around for me everywhere, unable to capture me.

Shannon was looking around nervously. The bad atmosphere prevented her from depending on anyone, so she didn’t know what to do.

Clara was complaining to herself. She was taking some fleeting glances at Miranda, so I’m sure she was irritated at the fact she concealed her ability to use golem magic.

Eva was… looking over her notes, completely ignoring the surrounding air.

May was the same. Rather, she was the accomplice who ran away with me.

(Good goddess, they get angry over something of that level… how cute, to be honest.)

Monica was trembling, as she made her way to me.

“C-chicken dickwadddd!! The line! The line that connects us has yet to recover! The bond of love that binds us together!!”

To her, Unit One who boasted an external battery spoke.

“Then what a frail bond it must have been.”

She said behind Monica’s back. There’s no doubt Unit Two and Three thought the same as they looked at her.

I couldn’t help but notice Monica’s movements were strange, so it must have been because I was still using the Magic Tool. I gripped the hilt, and thinking how everything had ended, just what would become of the rage of my ancestors and Milleia-san…

(Crap. I forgot. Well, it doesn’t change the result, so I guess it’s fine. Even so, it would be dull if I just left them angry.)

“Okay, all of you, line up for a bit. It’s time for a reward.”

… I thought up a plan.

# 21 - LYLE and mr. lyle

『About how mr. lyle forgot about us, it is my belief we should issue an intense protest. Best Lyle… this will bring about a huge influence to the Best Lyle records! What we've lost in this term was definitely a drastic loss!』

The Third emphasized it in the Jewel, but the words that returned were lonesome ones.

There were few left.

The Fifth spat out a tired sigh.

『There's a chance it isn't over yet.』

The Seventh shook his head against that statement.

『It was just a small-scale battle, so I don't think that's happening. After so much time has passed, if a conclusion has yet to be reached, I can only think that something failed immensely…』

Milleia produced a simple flintlock from the sleeve of her fluttery dress. It was even more an antique than what the Seventh used, and a gun that had to have a shell loaded after every single shot.

She checked over the gun as she spoke.

『… Some punishment shall be necessary. I was really looking forward to it, you know. Just how long do you think I've waited for this moment?』

The Seventh looked nostalgically at Milleia's gun. The Seventh was a lover of firearms, and perhaps it was the case that it was because of her influence, or so the Third thought to himself.

(Well, despite this and that, the two of them do get along quite well.)

While that was going on, the Fifth was looking up at the ceiling. The blurry images were gradually growing clearer, to show what seemed to be Lyle explaining something to his comrades.

『Oh, looks like that's it… seems he's done.』

From the conversation's contents and atmosphere, the Fifth deduced the war had ended. The Third rose from his seat.

『So it is over! Hey, mr. lyle on the battlefield was a valuable asset, so I wanted to witness it!』

Last time he saw the form of the boy fighting a large-scale monster, but none of them had seen mr. lyle on the plains of war. In that sense, having missed this time was quite painful to the ancestors.

… In the Best Lyle sense.

But as the Third was about to complain, Lyle's words took him to an abrupt stop.

『Now line up, and wait for your kisses.』

As Lyle said that, Monica raised her hand, and tried to make an appeal. She was jumping, and her maid clothes and twin tails were hopping up and down.

『Yes! Question here!! Are you going to kiss me too!!? This is an important point! A vital one!』

There, Lyle spoke tiredly.

『Are you an idiot? But I find that idiocy of yours to be cute as well. Of course, there's no way in hell I wouldn't kiss you! Whether the act have meaning or not, I want to kiss you, Monica!』

Surrounded by his female army, he gave the absolute worst statement, but he declared it with absolute confidence. Looking at the atmosphere alone, it wasn't unthinkable to assume he had said something cool.

But to the Third…

『Eh? mr. lyle… it couldn't be he's bringing them here? Everyone? … There's absolutely no need for that!』

Come this far, teaching the girls about them had little merit to be found. That's how the heads of history considered it. It had been put

off, and with the matter of Celes' Jewel knowing of their existences had way too many demerits included.

So having come to this point, disappearing without meeting one another would be best. And that way would be more interesting.

『If they find out we saw this and that, to say the least, Aria will fly into a rage.』

Saying that, the Fifth stood, and tried to make his way to his room. But Milleia grabbed his arm.

『Isn't it fine? Now, father, let's introduce ourselves to Lyle's wives.』

She was all smiles, but the Third could tell she was somewhat irritated. She was making a game of troubling the Fifth. No, perhaps fawning on him.

The Third tried to return to his room as well. There…

『Hmm? What…』

At that moment, Lyle's room of memories was flung open with good momentum, and the Third and the other ancestors were forcefully transported back to their own rooms.

The last thing they witnessed was a small Lyle in front of the room…

## ❼

I had thought to kiss everyone, but the level-headed Clara pointed something out, making me hesitant.

According to Clara.

"Lyle-san, I understand that you must have some sort of reason. But it will be troublesome if you wisp away everyone's consciousness. Guarding bodies is also important, but more than that, this is a battlefield where you can't say for sure what will happen. Just because the battle has ended, please don't let your guard down."

A plausible opinion. Hearing that, I decided to take it up.

“In that case, let’s decide who to take into the Jewel…”

Letting my line of sight spin around, I looked at Shannon. Seeing her golden eyes, I was reminded of Milleia-san. She said she wanted to meet her great grandchildren someday, so I looked at Shannon and Miranda, and nodded.

“Alright, then Miranda and Shannon it is. For now, prepare yourselves. Also… Novem, I choose you!”

When I swiftly held out my finger, Novem lowered her head.

“If you say so, Lyle-sama.”

There, Monica assumed the fetal position.

“… This time, I, Monica had no opportunities to perform… what’s more, it was even the long-awaited fever time.”

I approached Monica on the floor, and as she raised her face to me, I gave her a kiss on the forehead.

“Bear with that for now. When my business is over, I’ll return at once. Monica… today, I expect great things from your dinner.”

When I closed one eye and said that, Monica rose with a spin, letting even her twin tails rotate. She looked quite beautiful.

“Leave it all to me! Even if this be the battlefield, I, Monica will serve to my fullest, and prepare but the finest of foods!”

And I thought.

(Now then, if I have three of them, can I play it off? But result-wise it worked out. The ancestors didn’t have to see Novem, who they supported so much, get so angry… no, I guess the Third’s all that’s left of that.)

The ancestors that recommended Novem. With the disappearance of the Fourth, the Third was all that remained. As I thought, it was sorrowful, but their teachings still live on within me. They would get angry at me if I moped over it, so I grabbed Miranda- who was keeping wary of Novem- by the arm, and drew her close.

“… Hey, I’m still angry here, you know?”

She was still unsatisfied, and glaring at me, so with a serious face…

“I’m sorry, but I desire your lips at once. So I won’t ask the reason, and I don’t want to hear it. Give them to me.”

Surprising Miranda with an overbearing attitude different from usual, I went ahead and kissed her. Inserting the tongue, and activating the Skill… Connection… I felt the power leave her body, so I gently embraced her, and gently tucked her to bed in the tent.

“… Lo and behold my Skill.”

As I gave my impression, Shannon who’d witnessed that kiss spoke up.

“It’s really inconvenient. You have to kiss every time no matter what, and the normal Lyle occasionally hesitates. When we’re under pressure, I sometimes think, ‘just get on with it already’.”

Perhaps she had been discontent up to now, as she complained. I shot back.

“Fool, when he’s kissing the girl he likes, or a cute girl, a man’s heart can’t help but race. Isn’t it cute?”

When I set myself in a pose, Shannon drew back.

“*You’re* cute? Nope. Not happening. Having done something so heartless, you still plan on doing more, don’t you?”

I shrugged my shoulders before her, lifting her up in a princess cradle, before shutting her mouth with a kiss. Because of the surprise attack, Shannon thrashed around, as she lost her consciousness, so I gently lay her down beside Miranda.

“This girl, with her face so red… she really is cute.”

Her face, stuck in the bravado she put up before the kiss, was bright red. As I put on such a cool act, I noticed the surrounding eyes looking at me had become considerable cold.

I looked around.

“Fret not. You’ll all receive a deeper one come the fall of night! Now then, next is Novem…”

The fact their frustration built up so easily must be because they were worried about me. When you think of it that way, these cold, mocking eyes feel soothing to back in.

I am a happy man!

## ❼

Descending down into the Jewel, I looked around.

The round table room looked the same as usual, but having come in last, I took in the places air, and tilted my head.

“Why are you here? And why is Milleia-san the only other one here?”

There were only two in the room.

One was Milleia-san. Sitting in the Fifth’s chair, she smiled and waved at a surprised set of sisters. And the fleeting glances she took at me were extremely wrathful.

I cleared my throat.

“Now then, let me introduce them. One of the greatest beauties in the history of the Walt House, Milleia Walt… to you, Miranda, perhaps this name would work better? She’s big sis Milleia Circry.”

I emphasized beauty, and big sis, but Milleia-san’s atmosphere didn’t change.

『Pleasure to be of your acquaintance, I guess? My memories after marrying into the Circry House are vague, so perhaps we’ve met before, but I myself am seeing the both of you for the first time.』

Miranda spoke in surprise.

“Are you the same as Shannon?”

『That’s right. But my appearance is closer to you. As expected of

my great granddaughter, Miranda.』

Shannon was hiding behind Miranda, as she focused her eyes on the other in the conference room.

As I thought, I won't be able to get through this one with craftiness alone. I sat in my own seat, and introduced the other.

"Anyways, this small child here is LYLE. How should I put it, he's my memory. Apparently. Rather, why are you even here?"

When I asked with a tilt of my head, LYLE, who was kicking his feet up and down, put his elbow to the table, rested his chin on his hand, and spoke with a smile.

『Because I wanted to meet them by all means. Or is that not reason enough? It's been quite a while, Novem.』

Saying that, LYLE looked at Novem, and smiled. But Novem was acting strange. She was unnaturally taking distance, keeping cautious.

Taking her body a half-step back, it looked as if she was taking a fighting stance towards LYLE. Her face was more expressionless than usual, and when she looked at me, she smiled, but it felt somewhat stiff.

"What's wrong?"

"No, it was quite sudden. And it was quite different from what I expected."

It seems Novem had her own expectations of my Jewel. It's true that this situation was out of my own expectations as well.

"I see. It was unexpected for me as well. And that's how it is, so return to your room, small child. If you're lonely, I'll go and see you another time. Today I'm busy."

From here on is my pleasant time with Milleia-san. Or so I thought, when LYLE replied discontently.

『That would be troubling. I mean, I have some matters with Novem.

To add onto that, it's best you listened as well. In regards to Milleia-san, leave the other two to them. I'm sure it'll go better that way… even so…』

LYLE looked over Miranda and Shannon with a serious look on his face.

Touching his hand to his chin.

『Large breasts and small ones… add them, divide by two, and you get the average breasted Milleia-san, huh. However…』

With a 'however', he stood, before instantly jumping into Miranda's chest.

『As I thought, I like large breasts betteeeer!!』

Moving before I had realized it, Milleia-san pointed her gun's muzzle, and LYLE raised both his hands.

Shannon's body was trembling.

"Sis, this thing is Lyle's memories? Isn't he just a huge pervert!?"

With the gun's point thrust into him, LYLE took a quick look at that frightened Shannon, and shook his head.

『I wholeheartedly admit that small breasts have their value… but there's nothing interesting to be found in yours. You need to polish yourself a tad more, little girl.』

"… He's Lyle after all. I remember something similar coming from him before."

There, Milleia-san pulled the trigger with a smile.

A bang and smoke, and the smell of gunpowder filled clouded up the room. I see, so the Seventh was on the receiving end of that every time. Glad that the mystery had been solved, I approached LYLE.

『That's no good, LYLE-kun.』

"He's been shot! Sis, she shot Lyle! GyAAaAAAH!! He's standing back uppp!!"

A panicked Shannon looked as if she was about to cry, as she watched LYLE rise with a hand pressed to his bloody forehead. Miranda sighed.

“It doesn’t matter in here. Anyhow, the reason you called us was to meet with your ancestors? There’s quite a lot I’d like to ask.”

Miranda’s opinion was on the mark. When I was about to explain, LYLE gave a proposition.

『Then the two of you can ask Milleia-san whatever you want. I have business with Lyle and Novem after all. And wait, it’s about right time that Lyle learned. Wouldn’t you say so, Novem?』

As all eyes gathered on Novem, I addressed LYLE.

“If it’s about inheriting the memories of some goddess or evil god, then I already know about that.”

There, Shannon raised her voice.

“Hah!? The hell!?”

Miranda spoke to shut her up.

“Shannon, let’s hear the lovely lady out. It won’t be too late for questions after that.”

Looking at Miranda like that, Milleia gave a number of delighted nods. But LYLE shook his head.

『Wrong. That one isn’t anything too important. What I’m talking about is why Novem serves you, Lyle. Her guard was so high in my time that I called her the Iron Fortress. You don’t find it the slightest bit peculiar?』

Hearing that, I.

“That so? Isn’t it because I’m more charming than you? I’m sorry man, but I’m just that much cooler. Right, Novem?”

Hearing that, Novem gave a bitter smile.

“Right. While they’re both Lyle-sama, it’s true that the current one

is…”

As Novem replied as such, LYLE sent a harsh glare. It wasn’t envy. Or even resentment. Truly without any of those negative sentiments on him, LYLE smile.

『You really plan on hiding it forever? My apologies, but… Lyle isn’t your toy.』

It was as if LYLE was getting angry at Novem for my sake.

# Epilogue

『Talking to you in your current state won't get us anywhere. Sorry, but I'll be quarantining you a while.』

As LYLE said that, I suddenly found myself in the Seventh's room of memories. It seems I had been transported in an instant, but could that just be how strong an authority LYLE held over the Jewel, I wonder?

『Lyle!』

The Seventh had been sitting in a chair of the room. He stood and stared in surprise at my abrupt appearance.

"… Come to think of it, I haven't stopped by the Seventh's room too often. Only ever when we fought, perhaps?"

Saying that, I looked over the Seventh's… my grandfather's room with nostalgic sentiment. Is this how it used to look?

Whenever we fought, it would usually be in the yard's drilling grounds, so I tilted my head. I had the feeling he had let me play in this room long ago.

『You, even at a time like this… no, you're in a mr. lyle state right now, are you? Still, thinking back, you do have a point. I don't have as thick a past among the other ancestors, after all.』

As the Seventh sat in his seat, he told me to sit as well. We sat with a small, round table in between us, and on it, a cup manifested out of nothingness.

The Seventh spoke.

『It won't fill your stomach, but this is a matter of feelings. Have a drink.』

"Then drink I shall. It even has a scent."

I reminisced over the nostalgic flavor. Even within my vague and

hazy memory, I could remember that I'd drunken this tea before.

『… I haven't had the chance for a leisurely talk with you. Perhaps we'll get more chances hereon, but that's yet another sad tale. It's because our ancestors have faded away.』

First, Second, Sixth… and the Fourth had left the Skills to me, and vanished from the Jewel. Their roles had ended.

The role of the ancestors in the Jewel was to entrust their Skills to the Jewel's owner. In this case, me. To teach the Skills' uses as well, they were existences awoken from the records of the time…

"It's not as if I've been making light of your or anything, grandfather. It's true that I respect you. And some vague memories of you doting on me still remain."

The Seventh gave a lonesome laugh.

『I see. Right… but you see, Lyle. Was I really ever that great?』

"What's wrong? Growing weak at the knees?"

The Seventh folded his hands, and gazed out the window. Out the pane was the scene of the two birds flying away.

『… I've tried quite hard. I worked hard not to fall short of our ancestors. But what I succeeded in was only because of the groundwork they laid. Lyle, have you figured out why I'm so particular about guns?』

"Because they're the future? I also think that as long as the money problem is dealt with, mass production will become the key to victory. Though it's also true they're short of a decisive blow."

The Seventh nodded.

『… Being so close to the ancestors, I felt, and I thought. The real reason I chose the gun… Is it not because I didn't want to be compared to them?』

I sipped the tea, and smiled.

"What foolish words are those? You manifested Box, and Warp,

such incredible Skills, didn't you? You should have more confidence. I was even wrung dry of this and that by Celes, but I still think I'm definitely going to win."

The Seventh turned a different kind smile than usual at me. It didn't feel like he was mocking.

『If you'll say that much, it gives me some confidence. Now then, your memory that calls himself Lyle came out, so what are you going to do? Even if you want to leave this room, it seems it's been locked.』

It seems the door of memories was tightly sealed shut. Then there's no helping he be panicked.

"Then I'll just take it easy. It seems he wanted to talk to Novem about something. I'll have to ask about it later."

To me, the Seventh spoke. He wasn't particularly supportive of her. Of all else, the Forxuz House was something of a vassal house. She was only their daughter… what's more, nothing but the second daughter.

『Lyle… are you sure you don't trust Novem a little too much?』

## ❼

… It was LYLE's room.

As Novem was led in, she looked around, and realized at once that it was different from Lyle's room of old. It had been reproduced by the Jewel, but it was subtly different.

Those differences stemmed from the existence called LYLE, she concluded.

"The bookshelf on the right. The order of the books on the third shelf from the top is different. Lyle-sama barely read those ones. The placement of other books is also slightly off. On top of that, the room was much dustier than this. Because the servants shirked off on cleaning it."

Without preparing a chair for his guest, LYLE sat himself on the bed.

『… It's because you say things like that, that normal people take distance from you. But no matter what little 'Broken Novem' says this late in the game, I doubt it will make a difference.』

LYLE understood Novem's personality. And he didn't particularly hate her or anything. He only had discontentments at her treatment of Lyle.

The Forxuz House… among the clan that carried down memories of the goddess turned evil god Novem, the one whose memories were most vivid, and who inherited an outrageous amount of information was Novem.

At first, LYLE hadn't been knowledgeable about that field, but it was something he came to figure out after opening his eyes in the Jewel.

LYLE began talking.

『Memories are a large factor that influence one's character. With happy memories, based on the person, the individual may wish to feel more happiness, crushing others underfoot in the conquest for more. It all varies by person, but it's a fact that it has influence. So here's the question… Novem, do you think of yourself as the goddess, or as Novem the evil god? Or are you Novem, second daughter of the Forxuz House? Which is it?』

Inheriting memories. Simple in words, but if one were to think of it as akin to their own experiences, then who exactly would they be? Would it influence their establishment of self?

『Because of the self-loathing she inherited from Septem, Septem-san sealed her ability to be loved by humans, and served herself out for their sake. She served too much and failed them, but even now, her lesson lives on. So how about you, Novem?』

Novem couldn't answer. She was smiling, but she didn't make an attempt to answer. With something important out of place, and something unnecessary shoved in its space. That was the girl called Novem.

LYLE knew that. And he even thought she had purposely overlooked Celes' actions.

『No answer, huh? I'm fine with that too.』

To a fed-up LYLE, it was Novem's turn to question.

"I heard you were Lyle-sama's memories, LYLE-sama. Could it be you plan on reviving Lyle-sama's memories? In that case, the current Lyle-sama will be…"

LYLE noticed it was an important matter to Novem. And if he properly returned the memories, Novem might shatter the Jewel out of anger.

What was important to Novem was the current Lyle.

The LYLE of the past was of low priority.

『… It's a sad thing, but I share your opinion. I won't give the memories to Lyle. But I'll at least rile him up and pick some fights. There are a number of things I've no choice but to teach him. Also, I have to transmit the important stuff. Irrelevant to the will of the Jewel.』

There, Novem looked extremely delighted. Her expression was no lie.

LYLE could only look upon that expression of Novem with disappointment.

"A splendid decision. Not the memory, grant him your wisdom and technique, and dissapear. Fitting of LYLE-sama, a wonderful conclusion. This Novem is proud of you."

And she spoke with a horridly dark smile.

"When I think of what would be if humanity were able to make such judgement all those myriads ago, or perhaps even longer, it saddens me."

LYLE spoke.

『It ain't for your sake. It's for Lyle's. His memories stolen, Lyle was

nothing but an infant in a body too large. All I could do was leave him the memories of being loved… so even if everything was lost, and he was isolated away, I could leave the possibility he would stand up and look straight. He the little brother I've left to clean up my mess.』

Novem raised the hem of her skirt with a smile, giving a light bow.

"And this Novem shall be there to help him. LYLE-sama, please hold no need for concern."

And LYLE spoke. The largest reason he held dissatisfaction towards the girl.

『… Novem, that love of yours isn't something for a lover. That is what a mother directs her child. It isn't what Lyle is looking for.』

As a mother, she gave Lyle unconditional love. As a mother, she could put up, even with other women. As a mother, she wouldn't abandon Lyle to the end.

『I understand your personality. Though the others haven't noticed it in the slightest… a ten-year-old robbed of his memories, nothing more than a toddler… with a mental age of three, five tops, Lyle was a child even younger than he looked. I don't think you aimed for that. But as he was, you…』

Novem corrected her posture, and tilted her head inquisitively.

"Love is love, LYLE-sama."

She said…

## ❼

… Miranda stuck her knees, and her hand into the ground.

She held her right shoulder with her left hand, the end of her upturned eyes, a woman like the average of she and Shannon holding up the grip of her gun, loading a bullet.

She used a number of one-shot flintlocks, handling them quite skillfully. When told to come at her, Miranda thought she would be

able to take her down easily, but she couldn't match up at all.

The Jewel's round table room.

The round table extended out, making a space like an arena. Glaring at Milleia, Miranda vexingly stood to her feet.

The moment she took her left hand from her shoulder, she used her Skill to produce a number of nets… a large spider web… before her. The stitching was tight, and the gaps were narrow. They were sticky and made to disperse force, so if a round hit them, it was sure to stop.

But the bullet Milleia fired accurately travelled down the gaps in the numerous nets, hitting Miranda's left thigh on the mark.

"Kuh!

As Miranda fell to her knees once more, Shannon looked on quivering. To her, Milleia spoke.

『Hey, don't shake so much. In this space you get out with only the pain. Or have you come to understand it yet, Shannon? Your eyes are capable of more than this. If you were up to it.』

Walking forward, Milleia used the bayonet on her gun to easily cut apart the sticky mesh of threads.

Miranda looked on with surprise. In real combat it had been able to tangle up and render a Land Dragon immobile, threads made of her prided Skill.

And they were easily cut down.

『… Did you plan to win against Novem-chan at that level? You're too sweet, Miranda.』

As Milleia said that with a shrug of her shoulders, Miranda pulled three daggers from behind her hip. She threw the first one, and following behind it, she sliced with a dagger in each hand.

"If it's close combat!"

Milleia grinned, shooting the dagger down. The dagger in Miranda's

hand that is. And with her stance destroyed, Miranda hit a foot into the ground, grabbed the thrown dagger, and tried for close quarters again.

Physical strength, and damage output, Miranda excelled in every field. She had rapidly stacked up Growths, and she cut forward. Knees and hands, flank and shoulders, she carved her daggers into numerous places.

And yet none of Miranda's attacks grazed anything solid.

『If it's close combat, you can win? That's no good, Miranda… personally, I'm rooting for you, but you should at least be able to measure an opponent's strength properly.』

Kicked away by Milleia, Miranda rolled across the floor.

Since Shannon's sister was one-sidedly taken one, she turned to Milleia, and tried to use her demon eyes to touch her psyche…

"Kyah!"

… And failed.

『Touching an opponent's heart, huh. Shannon, you used that to commit mischief, did you? Wouldn't you say that naughty children need some punishment?』

Milleia took a step towards Shannon, and instantly leapt from the spot.

With her wounds healed up., Miranda threw a few knives.

She thought over a way to defeat such an unfair opponent. Her Skill was easily nullified. But she hadn't yet the mind to admit loss.

Seeing Miranda's eyes, Milleia smiled.

『Come with me. You've got to get used to fighting someone stronger than yourself.』

Miranda took a large stepped forward, threw in a feint, and closed in on Milleia. She was precisely shot through with a gun…

# ❼

“Done talking?”

As I was sipping tea, this time I was suddenly summoned to LYLE’s room.

I was exchanging some idle banter with the Sevenths, and as I thought, there were plenty of interesting stories of failure when it came to grandmother Zenoire. I ended up laughing grandly as well.

Especially when towards his majesty, she… as I was thinking that, LYLE looked away from me on the bed.

“What’s up?”

『Hmph, Novem said the current you was best, and that I was no good. It irritated me, so that’s all for today. And you’re definitely never getting your memories back.』

Seeing him sulk like a child, I spoke triumphantly.

“Very well! Now then, if I’m going to return now… could you have my memories ready by my next visit? No take-overs included?”

LYLE looked at me, and scoffed.

『The world isn’t so convenient. I’m definitely never handing them over. If you want them so bad, why not take them by force? The current you… maybe you’ll even be able to trouble me.』

I laughed.

“Then I shall assemble the conditions for my victory. I’ll mobilize my future wives to surround you and beat you to the ground! As a show of mercy, I don’t mind having them wear short skirts for the occasion.”

There, LYLE started thinking with a blank expression. And hanging his head, and crossing his arms…

『… H-how about garters?』

“You’re quite the greedy one. But garters, huh… why not.”

『For real! Hoorayyy!! I can’t wait for such a joyous occasion.』

“Yeah, you better wait! Then I have to go persuade them, so I’ll be taking my leave.”

『… I doubt it’ll work out though.』

LYLE gave a delightful laugh as he saw me off.

# Credits

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Author | — | (わい) Wai |
| Publication platfom | — | syosetu.com |
| Translator | — | Yoraikun |
| Book designer | — | Armaell |